

ASIAN CULT CINEMA

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Miyuki Iijima (*left*) and Noriko Endo, two of Japan's hot new starlets, have just signed a major movie deal after another successful season with the Nippon television series *Heisei Girl's School*. The popular TV program also stars Sakiko Mamiya who was featured on the back cover of ATC #11.

Asian Cult Cinema

Editor: Thomas Weisser

Design/Art: Francine Dali

Editorial from Thomas Weisser

You are holding the best issue we've ever published. Perhaps we'll never be able to top this one, but of course we will keep trying. However, for now, I'm delighted to say- with this issue, ACC is heading in a new direction.

I've been unhappy with the magazine for some months now. I was frustrated by the staleness which had developed within these pages, embarrassed by inexcusable mistakes, and dissatisfied over the sapience of some reviews. In fact, often, I completely disagreed with the critiques I published. (In this issue, I've taken the opportunity to correct that problem by writing my own reviews for a few of those movies, see page 30.) But, more importantly, I realized it was time for a major refurbishing job.

The most exciting thing about this issue (and hopefully many more to come) is its high caliber of contributors. Within these pages, you'll find a virtual who's who of entertaining genre writers, a stellar collection of respected, knowledgeable and opinionated authors who have joined the new ACC family. For instance **Ric Meyers** (former associate editor of *Starlog*, consulting editor in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, and head writer for the first issue of *Fangoria*, not to mention his ground breaking books *Martial Arts Movies: From Bruce Lee to the Ninjas* and *The Encyclopedia of Martial Arts Movies*) has come aboard with a controversial look at Japanese Pink Films. You'll also find articles by **Stefan Hammond**, the author of *Sex And Zen And A Bullet In The Head*, **Pete Tombs** (of *Immoral Tales* fame), *Markalite* editor **August Ragone**, *Wired* critic **Wagner James Au**, and **Steve Puchalski** (editor of *Shock Cinema*). But that's not all, **Tony Williams**, professor of Cinema Studies at Southern Illinois University and author of *Viet Nam War Films*, has written a wonderful tribute to HK bad guy *Shing Fui-On*. Also **Graham Lewis**, **Erik Hughes**, **Ray Ranaletta**, and syndicated columnist for *San Francisco Examiner* **Patrick Macias** are all writing for this issue. Plus, award-winning mystery writer **Max Allan Collins**, after directing the sequel to his film *Mommy* (the new one is called *Mommy's Day*), returns to ACC with a continuing column, *Foreign Crimes*. Now, you can understand why I'm so excited. But there's still more:

You'll notice this issue is 10 pages longer than the previous ones, hopefully that will be a permanent change. And, after six issues (accompanied by lots of complaints), the *Letters* column has returned. So sit back. Get comfortable. And prepare yourself for the best issue ever of **Asian Cult Cinema**.



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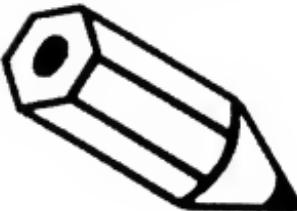
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Front cover features original water-color art by Mark Okui, designed for ACC;
on back cover: 21 year old singer/actress Ichiko Mutsuda, from her photo book

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with commentary by editor Tom Weisser



LETTERS

Dear Mr Weisser:

You may think this is a small bitch, but I have a complaint and I'm sure that I'm not the only one who feels this way. It's about the Letters Column, or maybe I should say the "lack of the Letters Column." With no warning this part of ATC disappeared with issue #7. There hasn't been a Letters Column since. I don't know why you discontinued this feature. It was my favorite part of the magazine. Now that it's gone, I may be gone too.

--Andy Kaufman

ACC:

What a mistake! Have you guys lost your minds? How can you cancel out the most entertaining part of the magazine? I'm obviously referring to the Letters Column. Why don't you ask your readers whether they'd like to see this column or not. Or are you afraid to do so?

--Bob Bowman

Editor:

The Letter's column was a forum. Everybody had a chance to say what they had on their mind (and sometimes that wasn't very much, but what the hell, it was an opportunity to be part of the Asian film explosion). What would it take for the column to come back?

--Stan Winklewetz

The above letters represent a small segment of mail we received concerning our decision to dump the Letters Column. We learned, from you, that we screwed up. And so, the Letters Column has returned. But, in answer to Stan Winklewetz' "what would it take for the column to come back," the answer is simple: Letters. If you don't write, we can't continue the column.

ACC:

I'm writing to give you my thoughts about Asian Cult Cinema (I still like the ATC title better). Please, please stop reviewing older titles and start reviewing the newer flicks

The last few issues (10 thru 12) have been clogged up with film reviews of titles previously reviewed in the ACC zine or the books. And force a pen into Mr Weisser's hand and have him write an essay or review for the zine.

--Andrew Kenny

Tom Weisser:

Congratulations on the name change! The old ATC title had that old "fanboy" sound to it. And, as I'm sure you already know, nobody's going to take the magazine seriously with a title like that.

I understand why it was called **Asian Trash Cinema** in the beginning (you explained the whole thing very well in #12's editorial), but now with **Asian Cult Cinema** I feel you finally are showing respect for the movies you seem to love.

The "name change" has sparked a lot of interesting mail. Most people have been enthusiastic about the new title, although some die-hards fans continue to complain that we have "sold out." Once again, I want to emphasize that I like the new name. And I feel it more accurately describes the material in the magazine.

*With this issue, a lot of changes were made. But the most important difference lies in the higher calibre of staff writers. Frankly, we could never have convinced many of these top notch journalists to contribute to the magazine when it was called **Asian Trash Cinema**.*

Editor of Asian Cult Cinema--

First off I feel I must mention my vast disappointment with ATC (or ACC now) since Scott Williams has taken the reigns. So much so I'm debating renewing my subscription. This sucks because I've always found ATC to be an informative and entertaining 'zine.

But the issues since Mr Williams' taking over have been embarrassing re-reads of warmed-over material. The coverage has become so

rudimentary that any fan with a passing interest in Hong Kong or Japanese cinema already knows the material. Issue #12 was exceptionally sad. Anyone wanting the info in that issue could (and should) go to the ATC Book. This issue (and the Bruce Lee issue #10) were giant steps back. Zine publishing is such a costly and difficult endeavor that space should never be used as filler which these issues clearly were.

Even with Hong Kong cinema going down there are still other things to write about. ACC should never be at a lack of fresh material. Basically, I believe Tom Weisser needs to have his hand in the mix more. Williams doesn't seem to have the knack for it.

--Andy Copp

*We appreciate your comments. And, while I don't agree with all your opinions, I do agree some changes had to be made with the 'zine. Initially, Scott Williams became my "right hand" in early '95 when Craig Ledbetter and I split our partnership. Scott brought a lot of new ideas to the table, some of them worked and some didn't. However, the most important thing Scott did was allow me the time to write and complete the two books (*Asian Trash Cinema: Book 2* and *Japanese Cinema: Essential Handbook*). It's true, as some of our readers have noted, I have not had "my hand in the mix" for quite awhile. But with this issue, all that has changed.*

Scott Williams has left the company. In his absence, I have taken over the complete editorial responsibility for the magazine. One of my first duties was gathering a team of knowledgeable, literate writers who could help me expand the parameters of the publication. We now have some of the very best genre writers in the world contributing to ACC. Hopefully, this issue will only be the beginning.

Editor--

I just finished reading the latest ACC (I've gotten used to the name change now) and wanted to share you some of my thoughts. The issue reminds me a lot of Mexico. What I mean is it's an uneven combination of high culture and devastating poverty, living side-by-side. The article written by Maki Hamamoto with Tom and Yuko Weisser on Japanese Censorship is terrific (I finally have a grasp on the whole fogging situation) while some of the reviews were piss-poor. For example, did John

Crawford really watch *High Risk?* How can he write an entire review of that movie without mentioning that it's supposed to be a satire of the Jackie Chan mystique? Boy! Did he ever miss the boat. And William Roberts review of *A Touch Of Evil* is nothing more than an elitist's opinion of HK gun-n-action movies.

Also, too many times, the reviewers (Brick Reno, Daniel Grissom, Dan Edmonds) made lame excuses for their shitty commentaries by complaining about how they couldn't understand what was going on because the movie didn't have English subtitles. Now, maybe I'm being stupid, but I don't think this is the movie's fault. If the reviewer doesn't feel qualified to critique a film, then he shouldn't even try. Otherwise, it's an insult to the reader.

However, on the flipside, Scott Williams conducted a very thorough and informative interview with the always entertaining Ric Meyers (and company), and the *Many Faces of Maggie Cheung* (in color yet!) was fantastic. --Joseph Williams

*I would agree that Scott Williams did a fine job interviewing Ric Meyers, with Karen and Bill Palmer, but we neglected to tell you who published the *Martial Arts Encyclopedia* and how to get it. So-- Scarecrow Press (located in Metuchen NJ) put it out. You should be able to get it at your local book store for \$65, available in hardbound only. The ISBN number is 0-8108-3027-2. Incidentally, you'll also notice that Ric Meyers has also joined the ACC staff with this issue. Check out page 40 for Ric's article on Japanese Pink Films.*

Dear Tom:

I'm responding to the letter written by Tim Harcross in Issue #7. He complained about the coverage of Japanese Cinema in ATC and about how "every issue has gotten more and more Japan heavy." And he also asked the rhetorical question: "Why do I subscribe at all?"

I agree with Tim's observation. I'm into Asian Films because I like Hong Kong/Chinese movies. Japanese films tend to be very slow and stylish to a fault. The perverse Nippon sexuality is no substitution for the slam-bam, in-your-face HK action films. Give us more coverage of martial arts and girl-n-guns movies. And less Yakuza, Keko Mask and Female Ninjas. Long live Jet Li! Martial Arts will never die!

--Geoffrey Merrill

Editor:

Tim Harcross is full of shit! I am a ATC subscriber and I read the magazine because of the wide coverage on all type of Asian films. Tim Harcross is not speaking for me when he says "Aren't you aware that all we really care about are Hong Kong movies." I think it's really sad when someone has limited his world to this extent (similar to people who only listen to one type of music, they're missing out on so much). So I just wanted to say ignore Tim Harcross and any other asshole like him. Keep covering both Japanese and Hong Kong films in your magazine (maybe you could also get into some India, Filipino, and Korean stuff too).

--Jim Logan

ATC:

There is nothing more tired than Hong Kong cinema. Talk about a genre that's gasping its last breath!then I see a letter to your Editorial Page from Tim Harcross complaining that *Asian Trash Cinema* is filled with too much Japanese coverage! Is this guy crazy? The Japanese stuff is the only reason I continue to buy the magazine. Please no more Jackie Chan shit! I am so sick of all these Chinese fanatics who have just found Jackie and want to convert the rest of America. Give me a break! When one of these idiots starts telling me all about Jackie-this and Jackie-that, I feel like screaming. Don't they know how ridiculous their hero worship is? I used to have a Chinese friend who used to go-on-and-on about *Sylvester Stalone* and the great American movies. It's all so embarrassing...

--Mark Deitz

Asian Cult Cinema:

Where the hell is Max Allan Collins? And why doesn't he write for the magazine anymore? Has Max gone the way of Craig? Did you guys have a fight or something?

--Jerry Mauder

Max has been very busy. He's been writing (*NYPD Blues* and his *Heller* book series) and he just finished directing the sequel to his motion picture *Mommy* (obviously, this one is called *Mommy's Day*) however, Max is back in ACC with this issue. Look for his new column on page 44.

And no, there was no fight "or something." Didn't you see his Introduction to our Japanese Cinema Book?

Mr Weisser, editor--

I've noticed a disturbing trend recently with your Asian Cult Cinema magazine. Articles of substance are missing (remember the good old days when Max Allan Collins tackled the *Lone Wolf* series, or when Bob Sargent unveiled the mysterious *Kyoshiro Nemuri* films, or when Travis Crawford waded through the murky waters of *Captured For Sex*) replaced with a collection of overly simplistic reviews, obviously designed for the "new-wave" of fans who have jumped on the bandwagon because Asian films are suddenly hip.

My advice to you and your magazine is to put the same kind of thought and time into the 'zine that you have put into the spinoff books (*Japanese Cinema: Essential Handbook* is a terrific trendsetting work, heads and shoulders above the drivel printed in the most recent issues of ACC).

--Mark Owens

Tom--

I am in knee-deep in your new book, *Japanese Cinema: Essential Handbook*. This is a major achievement. I'd call it the most important reference book written this year, in any subject. Congratulations.

--Steve Puchalski

Dear Tom:

This is just a note to thank you for writing the *Japanese Cinema Book*. You must be very proud to know that you have written a book which will be used as the definitive reference guide for many years to come. The book has surprised and overwhelmed me. I read your other ATC books, but they couldn't have prepared me for the kind of depth and research which you have produced with this new volume. I just wanted you to know. And what are you planning on doing next?

--Frank Murray

Thank you for the very kind words about the book, but I need to reiterate a point. *Japanese Cinema: The Essential Handbook* could never have been written without input from my co-author, Yuko Mihara. She brought the most important element to the project: an intrinsic, first-hand knowledge of Japanese Cinema. The book is a "major accomplishment" because it's filled with information which, never before, has been available to the Western World. Yuko was (and is) an invaluable partner.

With regards to future projects: As I said earlier in this column, my current goal is to get the ACC magazine back on track. Besides that, Yuko and I have begun research work on yet another book, this time on the complete History of Japanese Pink Films.

Asian Cult Cinema:

I enjoyed the most recent ACC (#13). It was filled with lots of wonderful stuff (anytime I can read about something that I didn't know existed, I'm delighted). I especially enjoyed Steve Puchalski's review of *Angel Dust*. It's great to see Steve as part of the ACC family (I've been following his career through the Fangoria days {Is he really *Dr Cyclops*?} and his own terrific zine, *Shock Cinema*) and I hope he continues writing for you. (Hopefully, Steve will be a permanent member of the new group of ACC contributors. Take a look at his review for *Death Of Honor* on pg 10, Ed)

His review of *Angel Dust* made me search out the film (no easy feat, but finally located through Video Search of Miami). And what a pleasant experience! I'm now a BIG fan of director Toshihiro Ishii fan. I read all about him in the book *Japanese Cinema: Essential Handbook* but I still want to know more. Have you considered doing an indepth article on him or his other films? (We are also *Ishii* fans. Take a look at the *Crazy Thunder Road* critique in the Review section. Ed.)

--Nick Jordan

ACC:

At first, I was disappointed to see the Letter Column gone. But now I realize that it's probably for the best. Some of the comments were stupid and essentially worthless.

Besides, it's great to not have to read the pathetic rantings of Laurine White in issue after issue....

--Gary Michaelson

Dear Tom,

Congratulations on your marriage. But I can't congratulate you on the latest issue of ATC (#9). Daniel Grissom's article on the *Female Ninjas: Magic Chronicles* was embarrassing. He wrote "Matsuhira, the king, is after the 100,000 gold coins." This only shows how little he (and apparently you and your staff) know about Japan. There is and was no king! He's called an emperor. I suggest that you all do

some homework before you continue any further. Sit down and watch the spectacular *Shogun* with Richard Chamberlain and learn about Japan....

--Laurine White

How nice to hear from you again.

And you are, somewhat, correct. The top Japanese leader was never called a "king." But then he wasn't called an "emperor" either. In truth, he's called "tenno." This is a Japanese word (obviously) which can be translated any number of different ways: from ruler to sovereign, minister to guardian, emperor to king. In the West, the most accepted title is Emperor (but king would not necessarily be incorrect). The fact is, even though there was (is) one emperor, there were many "kings" in the smaller prefectures.

*But more importantly, I hardly think director Jerry London's *Shogun* (a made for TV mini-series from 1980) can or should be considered quintessential reference material. No matter how entertaining *Shogun* may be, it's still little more than a big-budget costume drama from the director who gave us such memorable "hits" as *Victim Of Love*, *Haunting Of Sarah Hardy* and *Rent-A-Cop*.*

Asian Cult Cinema mag:

Writing to comment on the latest issue #13, which I'm happy to see out. With this issue you're back up to speed with interesting informative articles and reviews.

Regarding your review for *Hunting List*: Maybe you guys watch too many Asian films and miss out on some of the numerous American films, but while the reviewer caught the blatant swipes from the climax of *True Romance*, he completely missed all the other references (homages?) in the film. (Unfortunately, we can't expect our reviewers to catch every cinematic "in-joke" when they write their critiques. True, the beginning of *Hunting List* rips off the Sean Penn/ Gary Oldman vehicle, *State Of Grace* (1990) and, sure enough, the midsection plays like Sonny's death scene in *The Godfather*. But is it really necessary to point this out? In defense of our reviewer Nick Chapman, he did what he was supposed to do. He reviewed the movie. Ed.)

There were a lot of articles worth reading in issue 13, although after reading the article on Censorship in Japan and after reading about the Japanese *Angel Guts* films, I just gotta try-

n-not-think, I'm too long at being a W.A.S.P., some of these Japanese cultural quirks are beyond me. I have no desire to be Japanese (like some freaks I've met) but I am as open as I can be to watch more and more. When I was younger, I remember guys (mostly this was in the Army) who said they preferred Japanese women to North American women, as the Nippon women were more submissive, etc. Even then I was suspicious. I am not sure that the films have supported this fantasy theory. Certainly, the films of Yasujiro Ozu set me straight on who runs thing in the house in Japan. I love his films. I've never had any trouble understanding the "Japanese philosophy" when watching his movies.

--George Metzger

Yasujiro Ozu made a career of "dramatic" comedies (50+ movies between 1928-1963) mostly featuring strong-willed women. But it would be equally unfair to judge the "Japanese philosophy" on his concepts as it would to judge it on Rapeman or Keko Mask.

Dear sir:

There is nothing funny about rape. And there is nothing funny about a movie which glamorizes a man who rapes women. I'm referring to Ray Ranaletta's absurd article on the movie **Rapeman** in issue #11. The entire thrust of his article is that if you, as a reader (or viewer) don't think the idea of a man raping women as a hero isn't cool, then you are a Politically Correct whining idiot. Then he goes on to describe these films as wet dreams. When rhetorical asking the question of these films being repellent he answers himself with a resounding "no fucking way."

Mr Ranaletta comes off like a deranged, slobbering idiot out to insult you for not agreeing with his twisted viewpoint. Not only that, but **Rapeman** was already covered in the previous issue. We didn't need more space dedicated to a movie that shouldn't have been reviewed in the first place.

--Andy (full name withheld)

ACC--

Sometimes it's difficult to justify the things you do. For example, dedicating 4 pages to a movie called **Rapeman**. Now, I admit I haven't seen this film (nor have I any interest in seeing it), but a movie like this shouldn't be in the pages of Asian Trash (Cult) Cinema. Let's get

serious-- a superhero who gets paid to rape women? Don't we have enough problems in the world today? As Ray Ranaletta wrote in his article: "In and of itself, this whole concept seems at its worst to be a product of a sick mind and at its best, a grossly offensive idea." This isn't something that should be covered in a magazine which is read by teenagers. You have a responsibility to your readers. Think about that.

--James Turner

This magazine is not intended for teenager consumption (the "nude back cover" should keep it out of their hands). But, James, what bothers us the most about your letter is how quickly you criticize something you haven't even seen. Regardless of the subject matter, the Rapeman movies are genuinely funny and well-written. Essentially, they are effective works of black humor.

But we also agree with the "There's nothing funny about rape" sentiment from Andy. By the same token, there's nothing funny about murder either, yet there are countless comedies revolving around it. Bottomline, satire has to be irreverent to be effective.

ACC:

I think you guys screwed up. On the last page of ACC #13, in a short feature on Jackie Chan, you wrote that he is married to a former Taiwanese actress who lives in the United States where she takes care of his daughter. Much information has been recently published in magazines and Jackie Chan "newsletters" which indicate that he has a son not a daughter. You should make a correction.

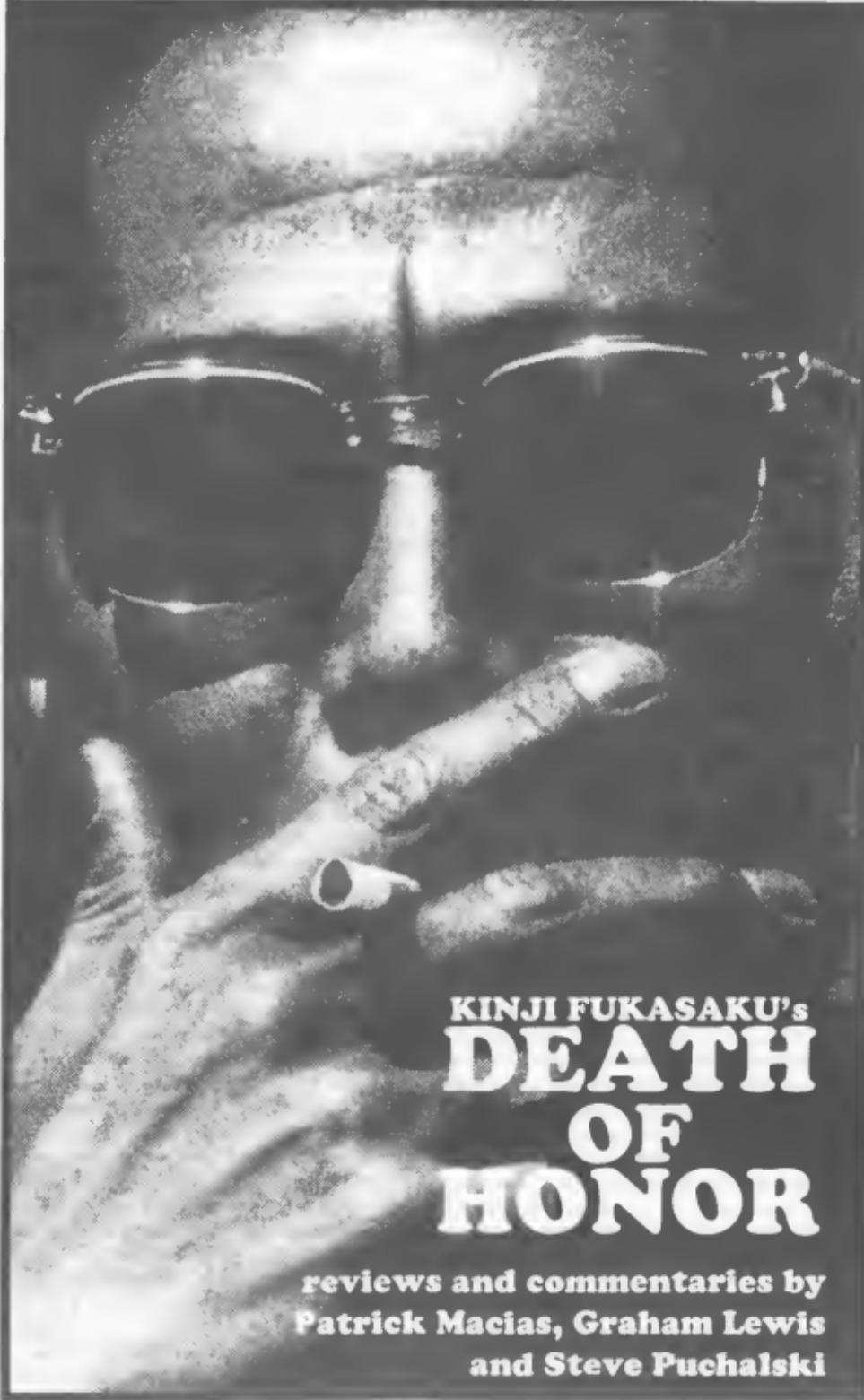
--Lisa Dunlop

Much has also been written about how all of it is crap and that Jackie is actually gay. Who knows what to believe. Jackie Chan has managed to keep his private-life very private, virtually "tabloid free." This feat is unparalleled in the Entertainment World.

We reported on the facts, as transcribed from HK's **Cinemart** magazine, about Jackie receiving an honorary "Doctor of Social Science" degree from the Hong Kong Baptist University (November 1995). In his acceptance speech, he specifically made mention to his wife and daughter.

ACC encourages letters from its readers.

Write to: ACC, Box 16-1919, Miami FL



KINJI FUKASAKU's
**DEATH
OF
HONOR**

reviews and commentaries by
**Patrick Macias, Graham Lewis
and Steve Puchalski**

DEATH OF HONOR

[JINGI NO HAKABA] (1976)

directed by Kinji Fukasaku

with Tetsuya Watari, Tatsuo Umemiya, Noboru Ando

Reviewed by Steve Puchalski

Kinji Fukasaku has had an amazing film career. Unfortunately, American audiences don't have a clue, since few of his movies have graced U.S. theatres. In fact, until recently he was best known for two of his most laughable productions—the visually splendid (but emotionally vapid) space-fantasy *Message From Space* and *The Green Slime*, one of the most hilariously misguided sci-fi films of the late '60s (nevertheless, with a kick-ass theme song). It wasn't until *Black Lizard* was released onto the arthouse circuit in the late '80s that Anglo audiences got a taste of Fukasaku's more subversive talents. This gangland epic provides indelible proof of his directorial expertise. Written by Goro Fujita and based on the true tale of Rikio Ishikawa, one of Japan's most notorious Yakuza [gangster], it's a celluloid kick to the solar plexus.

In the opening b&w images of his childhood, a voice-over laments that even as a child, Ishikawa had no respect for authority. That's nothing compared to his adult life when he became a "stupid animal" killing machine, who was at first embraced, and then spurned, by the local Yakuza. The story begins in the turbulent months after World War II, with Ishikawa as a hot-headed torpedo for the Kawada clan. And for a very short time, things look good, including a successful run-in with the infamous "3-Nations Gang" (a combination of Chinese, Tai and Korean thugs), which helps put the Japanese back in charge of their own underworld.

Ishikawa's problem is that he's always driven by unstable passions-- usually with the most violent, disastrous results. He gets mildly pissed off and blows up a guy's car. He attacks an opposing clan member and nearly ignites a gang war. And when his Yakuza 'father' whips him for being such an idiot, Ishikawa does what any violent moron would do, and promptly gets blind drunk and tries to slice up his own gangland elder. Smart guy, eh? Afterward, things get worse, with prison teaching Ishikawa to be an even bigger psycho. Plus, once out of the slammer, he begins shooting up heroin. Now there's a good idea! Let's become a revengeful, brain-fried junkie and take on both sides-- the cops as well as his old Yakuza pals. And wait until you see what this wacko does with the cremated remains of his one true love! Compared to Ishikawa, Joe Pesci in *Goodfellas* looks like he was on Valium.

Kinji Fukasaku



KINJI FUKASAKU DEATH OF HONORABLE YAKUZA

by Patrick Macias

While it would be madness to say Kinji Fukasaku has directed every Japanese movie ever made, a look in a Japanese video store will reveal that he has directed a hell of lot of them. All genres are known to him-- revisionist yakuza epics, supernatural samurai stories, rubber monster mayhem, war films, romance, and even straight-faced drama

While Fukasaku's name is never spoken alongside internationally recognized makers like Kurosawa, Ozu, Oshima, or even Seijun Suzuki, he is still one of the few Japanese directors whose work has been widely seen by audiences outside of Japan. This isn't to say that his notorious *Green Slime* (1968), or his *Star Wars*-inspired *Message from Space*

both articles continued on next page

DEATH OF HONOR review by Steve Puchalski
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Tetsuya Watari holds the screen captive in the title role, and though Ishikawa is a savage brute, he's also a fascinating one. Not only is he totally cool (hence, wearing his sunglasses indoors and out), but even a siege by a platoon of heavy-armed police doesn't phase the guy. Of course, he also demonstrates his ass-backwards flair with the ladies when he's attracted to a pretty young lass, pushes his way into her room, shoves money at her, and goes to work raping her. This character has "balls", and so does the entire film.

What truly sets this film apart from our usual deviant mob flick are Fukasaku's bursts of near-hallucinogenic, hand-held action and violence, which go into overdrive whenever Ishikawa does. It's all so deliriously photographed and edited that you'll need a double dose of Dramamine as the camera spins out of control-capturing in visual terms the chaos of the entire country in the wake of World War II. Better still, on a purely dramatic level, Fukasaku crams three decades of conflict, psychology and searing violence into less than two hours, without sacrificing the political/ moral complexity of the tale. It's a riveting portrait of a sociopath-- a real-life *Natural Born Killer* of Japan-- and nothing that Fukasaku has done (especially not *The Green Slime*) will prepare you for this explosion of high-octane cinema.



Tetsuya Watari (right) from DEATH OF HONOR

KINJII FUKASAKU critique by Patrick Macias
continued from previous page

(1978), are great international cinema; but they have been widely seen in America. Recognition might be Fukasaku's biggest obstacle in joining the ranks of his more prestigious peers. Although he directed a good portion of *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) most of the credit has gone to co-director **Richard Fleischer**. Even with the recent US release of one of Fukasaku's very best productions, *Black Lizard*, little was made of the director's talents. The film ended up being sold as a Yukio Mishima movie, a major insult considering Mishima's contribution is a brief stiff-faced cameo (not to mention the self-indulgent script).

Although belated, Fukasaku may finally get some respect with the subtitled VSoM release of *Death of Honor* (*Jingi No Hakaba*, 1976). That this will be the first Toei yakuza movie many will see is ironic, for the film finds both Fukasaku and the entire yakuza genre at the end of long evolutionary journey together.

Born in Mito city in 1930, Fukasaku became an assistant director for Toei Studios in 1953 before making his first film *Furaibo Tantei, Akai Tanima No Sangeki* (Drifting Detective: Bloody Story of Red Valley) in 1961. His major breakthrough was the yakuza film *Hitokiri Yota Kyoken Sankydai* (Massacre Yota: Three Rabid Brothers, 1972). Up until this point, yakuza movies were known as "ninkyo eiga", or "chivalry films." This was a genre that, while still focused on the timeless yakuza rituals of gambling, crime, and violence, always emphasized "honorable" concepts of duty, obligation, and loyalty among the gangsters.

Fukasaku revolutionized the yakuza film with *Hitokiri Yota* and even more so with his acclaimed *Jingi Naki Tatakai* (Fight Without Honor) series. These films focused on the struggles of ruthless gangsters in an ultra-violent and cynical

modern world; one never depicted with such ferocity in Japanese film before. Riding on the dark mood and pessimism prevalent both in Japanese politics and culture in the early 1970s, Fukasaku's uncompromising visions were embraced, both critically and at the box-office. Their success inspired other studios and directors to turn what had previously been a romantic genre and into a new exploitation milieu. This new breed, the "jitsuroku" or "true document" films, were "inspired by legendary yakuza figures and events, and played up only the most sordid elements. The myth of the "honorable" gangster was tarnished forever. If Fukasaku had helped to kill the chivalry film with his previous output, then *Death of Honor*, as its title proclaims, is the final shovel full of dirt on the coffin. It is without a doubt, one of the most harrowing, depressing, and brutal movies to ever come from a major Japanese studio. We are left with no choice but to now rank it as one of the best and boldest films.

Death of Honor charts several years in the life of real life killer and born loser Rikio Ishikawa as he goes from failed gangster, to heroin addict, to habitual murderer, to his death in an apocalyptic rooftop suicide. As if to underline the dramatic changes the yakuza film had undergone, former chivalry film star Tetsuya Watari was cast as Ishikawa. Fukasaku plays his "true document" cards by including tape recorded interviews with those who actually knew Ishikawa in real life. Adding to the documentary feel are photo montages, lengthy sepia-toned sequences, and Fukasaku's trademark hand-held camera, employed whenever violence erupts on screen; which is of course, with pathological regularity. While all these techniques were used before (pioneered mostly in *Jingi Naki Tatakai*), the new volume and intensity here have a cumulative effect that is far more devastating. Post-war Japan, a favorite setting for yakuza films, is depicted as a literal hell on earth;

not that it's drinking, whoring, scheming, and murdering denizens would notice or mind. Ishikawa's logical solace in heroin addiction is just another way to get in touch with the oblivion that surrounds him.

Ishikawa's joyless life, and the terminal environments he is condemned to move downward in, are clinically realized by a director who had sketched these motifs many times before. *Death of Honor* bears a strong resemblance to an older Fukasaku production: *Gendai Yakuza: Hitokiri Yota* (Modern Yakuza: Shameless Human Sacrifice, 1972). In that film Bunta Sugawara played Goro, another post-war loser who messes up every opportunity to make good with the larger yakuza gangs who eventually have him killed. The differences are that Goro loved what he was doing; celebrating his every act of badness like a talisman of individuality. In *Death of Honor*, Ishikawa wanders aimlessly from one violent episode to the next, a psychopath as opposed to Goro's sociopath. In *Gendai Yakuza*, Goro has an honest-to-goodness love affair with a prostitute and their brutal, mutual death was a soiled liberation from a world that could not accept them. Ishikawa's involvement with his tubercular girlfriend is just another transgression; someone to have sex with and a place to shoot up junk. Clearly Fukasaku is deconstructing his own myths here.

Death of Honor feels less like another yakuza film outing, and more like a personal exorcism on Fukasaku's part; a graduation piece for both the director and for viewers. Yakuza movies ventured as far into violence and pessimism as they possibly could. In the wake brought on by *Death of Honor*, the genre would be in decline for many years to come. It is indeed the "death of honor" (and even "hope") that face both Ishikawa and Fukasaku at the conclusion. One man splatters on the pavement, another bids farewell to the yakuza genre.

DEATH OF HONOR

Psycho Junkie: A Tradition in Film

by Graham R. Lewis

Most mob films, no matter their country of origin, have much in common. One element many share is the presence of a "Psycho Junkie," a character whose extreme addictions to his own obsessions lead to death and destruction-- his own, as well as those around him. Sometimes the Psycho Junkie is the protagonist, "our hero," as in **Kinji Fukasaku's** *Death Of Honor* (1976), **Beat Takeshi Kitano's** *Violent Cop* (1989) {and *Sonatine* (1993)}, **Abel Ferrara's** *Bad Lieutenant* (1992), and **Brian DePalma's** *Scareface* (1983). Just as often, the Psycho Junkie is the antagonist, the "bad guy," or one of our hero's friends or family. This is the case in **Ringo Lam's** *Full Contact* (1992), **Billy Tang's** *Run And Kill* (1993), **Kitano's** *Boiling Point* (1992), and **Martin Scorsese's** *Mean Streets* (1973), *Goodfellas* (1990), and *Casino* (1995).

Japan's *Death Of Honor* is one of the most intense mob films ever made. The character of Rikio Ishikawa (played with cool relish by **Tetsuya Watari**), in his tone of voice, body language, and obvious lust for all things violent, forces viewers into a constant state of nervous anticipation. What will he do next? Piss on street whores? Shoot heroin while having sex? Stab his Clan Boss? Chew on his girl-friend's cremated bones? Absolutely nothing but Death itself could stop Rikio's hunger for gambling, drugs, rape, and murder. And the tone of the film never lets up! The only scene remotely humourous

is when the cops and gangsters join forces to try to force Rikio from his hideout. After using guns and smoke-bombs, they try stoning him out with rocks. Other than that, you're on your own, buddy. Especially considering that *Death Of Honor* is based on a true account, written by a former Yakuza member, **Goro Fujita**. This is much like 's accounts becoming the basis of Scorsese's *Goodfellas* and *Casino*; the films even share similar narrative techniques-- *Death Of Honor* and *Casino* both begin with another character's voice-over describing the hero's life. The films also share lines of dialog-- both *Death Of Honor* and *Goodfellas* feature the line "More than anything else I (he) always wanted to be a gangster (yakuza)." But the similarities end there.

While the Scorsese films certainly feature Psycho Junkie characters (usually played by **Robert DeNiro** or **Joe Pesci** or both), the films also contain a nostalgic, sentimental tone. The viewers want to be gangsters too-- even when things get bad, the thug life looks like fun. If you are killed, hey, that's the game. The violence these characters commit is brutal, but more lighthearted moments in the films help offset that brutality. This is due to Scorsese's obvious admiration for his gangsters-- their power, their friendships, their odd takes on Catholicism. Fukasaku, however, seems to have little admiration for Rikio-- we are shown his most petty, most depraved moments constantly. He obviously never felt the brotherhood, the camaraderie, that Henry or Ace make so integral to their lives in the Scorsese films (and those characters are even

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outsiders to the Sicilians). The only time we find an admiring tone applied to Rikio Ishikawa is at the beginning, when the voice-over describes him as a charismatic figure, and at the end when we find that, before his suicide, Ishikawa made it clear he wanted the enigmatic word **honor** carved on his tombstone. Even then, Fukasaku tells us straight out that no one has the faintest idea what Rikio meant by that final gesture.

The single American mob film that almost reaches this pinnacle of doom is Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant. Harvey Keitel's character is very similar to*



Harvey Keitel

Rikio. His whoring, his violence, his drug addiction, and his detachment from the human race all match. Still, even Ferrara gives us an out, a way to admire Keitel. Ferrara lets us know, most clearly

in the scenes where Keitel hallucinates Christ and then provides an escape for the boys who raped the nun, that salvation is possible. For Rikio, salvation is not only impossible, but it's unwanted.

The Psycho Junkies of Takeshi Kitano's films, *Violent Cop* and *Sonatine*, while not as over the top as Rikio, still give us clear vision into their defining madness. *Violent Cop*, like *Bad Lieutenant*, shows the inevitable decline of a cop too involved in mob dealings and lifestyles. Kitano's Azuma is not a drug addict, but an addict of violence. He can't keep his fists in his pocket. Azuma isn't "on the take," but his insistence in giving no face to the Yakuza leads to his sister's rape, her death at Azuma's hands, and Azuma's own violent end. In comparison, Kitano's Murakawa in *Sonatine*, though shown to be a pretty cool guy in the "playing on



Tetsuya Watari
in Death of Honor

the beach" scenes, still can't control his obsession for danger and violence. Murakawa's love of Russian Roulette is a perfect example. He first forces his men to play with a gun only he knows is empty, but later dreams (in a wonderful bit of foreshadowing) he lost the game along with his brains. At film's end, after Murakawa shoots up the H.Q of the Boss who betrayed him, he puts a gun to his head and (like Rikio) commits suicide. He knows the woman who loves him is waiting, but he also knows escape from his deeds is impossible.

On the American side, Scorsese's attempt to balance brutality with sentimentality is taken even farther by the intentional (maybe, unintentional, you decide) humor of DePalma's *Scarface*. Once again we are presented with some incredibly brutal violence (the chainsaw scene, etc.), but this time it's offset by the hilarious combination of Al Pacino's performance and Oliver Stone's screenplay. The character of Tony Montana is a Psycho Junkie with a sense of humor. You recall some of the lines-- "*I'll bury those cockaroaches,*" "*Thees town ees a great beeg poosy waiting to be fucked,*" "*Say hello to my leetle fren.*" Delivered in Pacino's super-heavy Hispanic dialect, these lines become jokes from a dirty Frito Bandito commercial. As a result, the final bloodbath shootout, instead of being horrifying, is cartoonish. We laugh rather than

cringe when Montana pushes his face into a mountain of cocaine to keep himself upright and shooting.

Many of the other Japanese/Hong Kong directors follow Fukasaku's lead. Billy Tang's *Run And Kill* is another vision of a bleak, bleak world. Not only does Fatty (Kent Cheung) mistakenly contract his wife's murder while drunkenly yapping in a bar, the contract is carried out, his business is burned down, his mother and daughter are brutally murdered before his eyes, and he is left insane and jabbering at film's end. *Run And Kill* may begin with some domestic comedy concerning Fatty's girth and his wife's affair, but it soon becomes almost as doomladen as *Death Of Honor*. This, of course, is due mostly to Simon Yam's performance as the Psycho Junkie, Fung. Yam is completely believable, especially in the most crucial scene displaying his madness-- when he taunts Fatty with the charred remains of Fatty's burnt alive daughter. Just look at his eyes-- no Tony Montana there at all.

Another compelling performance by Yam as a Triad Psycho Junkie is found in Ringo Lam's *Full Contact*. Here Yam does go "over the top" in Tony Montana fashion-- his character, Judge, is a sadistic homosexual who can make weapons appear, magician-like, out of his handkerchief. Still, Yam projects a creepiness, a depth of depravity that Pacino couldn't give to Montana. When Judge goes from giving his cousin Sam hell for not staying in touch with his (Sam's) mother, to, minutes later, laughing maniacally while slaying an entire family in order to kill Chow Yun-Fat, well, again, look at his eyes. Flamboyant homosexual killer or no, you believe Judge's madness has no end. Though there is humor in the film-- Chow's scowl as Judge repeatedly tries to pick him up, Virgin's psychoslut antics, Deano's stupidity-- Ringo Lam isn't exactly a director of "feel good" movies. If not for the final

shot of Chow grabbing the suitcase of money and riding away on a motorcycle, the atmosphere would be wonderfully and perfectly cynical.



Beat Takeshi Kitano

More homosexual Psycho Junkie madness is on hand in **Beat Takeshi Kitano's** *Boiling Point*. While not flamboyantly gay, Kitano's character is even creepier, more akin to Rikio. Kitano's performance makes clear that the character delves into homosexuality simply to degrade himself and others further, rather than out of genetic disposition. He'll rape either sex; it just depends on who is within arm's reach at the moment. In this film, as in Scorsese's darkest mob film, *Mean Streets*, Kitano's character (like DeNiro's Johnny Boy) simply refuses to believe any of his mistakes will come back to haunt him. In scenes mirroring Rikio's struggles with Yakuza bosses, Kitano's character would rather kill the Clan Boss than offer up a finger and the money he owes.

Also like DeNiro in *Mean Streets*, Kitano's madness is infectious. As Johnny Boy slowly draws Charlie (Keitel) into his web of self-delusion, so does Kitano charge up the boys from Tokyo who are looking for guns in Okinawa to kill a Yakuza back home. They all find the reality of shooting and being shot at a hard pill to swallow. *Boiling Point* is the most uneven of Kitano's Yakuza trilogy.

as the scenes involving the boys from Tokyo range from decent black comedy to awful slapstick. *Mean Streets*, however, is Scorsese's least sentimental mob film. Though there are the usual "brotherhood" scenes between the boys, the doomed affair between Keitel and his epileptic girlfriend, Keitel's delusions of helping Johnny Boy, and their shooting and car wreck at film's end all strike chords that resonate more deeply into the "dark truths of mob life" than his later films.

Still, what of other classic contemporary mob films like Coppola's Godfather trilogy, *Poon Man Kit's To Be Number One*, or John Woo's "heroic bloodshed" cycle (and a zillion other mob films I haven't room to cover)? While these films feature tons of double crosses, violent characters, and virtual barrels of blood, there is no one Psycho Junkie who brings down the house. The double crosses here are for monetary gain and political power that lasts, not an unnatur-

al desire to kill and be killed. In the worlds of Coppola, Kit, and Woo, sins are willfully chosen and are called "business." In mob films featuring a Psycho Junkie, choice is not an option, and the "business" conducted is secondary to the violence of conducting it.

All told, the characters of Psycho Junkies can be the most, or least, interesting features in the films they populate. As we all know, Asian film makers are far more comfortable in portraying their Psycho Junkies as enigmas of pure

evil. It is, alas, usually American studios and directors who find it necessary to give audiences a safety valve to vent the pressure threatening their theatrical comfort zones. If your zone needs no such valve, then films like *Death Of Honor* and the others mentioned here might be just what you've been looking for.



ULTRAMAN FLIES AGAIN!

The original episodes of the classic Ultraman TV series is back in syndication. An independent television production company, **Expressions in Animation** based in Dayton Ohio has purchased the exclusive rights to the vintage Ultraman episodes. Anyone interested in promotional or distribution information and/or photographs may contact **Rick Martin** at (513) 277-7050.

"We are very excited about this release, as I grew up with the TV show back in the late sixties/early seventies," Rick told ACC, "Since I personally love the show, I am deeply honored that our company is resurrecting the series."



Expression is releasing the first 4 uncut episodes in a collector's package, *Ultraman: A 30th Anniversary Collection* (24.95)

The concept was created by Toho FX wizard **Eiji Tsuburaya** in '66 as an offshoot of the *Ultra Q* series.

the 10 Best Hong Kong Movies

by Wagner James Au

Critic Wagner James Au has compiled the following list of essential HK films for Asian Cult Cinema; the listing is in alphabetical order

Bullet in the Head

Jackie Cheung, Tony Leung, and Waise Lee-- all excellent, especially Leung-- are three friends during the late 60's, who flee to Vietnam in search of fortune and adventure. Their early years in Hong Kong are tracked in skipping, idyllic scenes that evoke **Truffaut**: these are basically decent kids, we are meant to know, hardened by circumstance, but held to decency by their loyalty to one another. This loyalty is tested to inhuman lengths, when they arrive in Hanoi. The war is at its peak, and the city has gone mad. In an early scene, the friends knock over a jewelry store-- only to be stopped by a jeep-load of soldiers, who are on their way to loot it themselves. **Oliver Stone's Salvador** comes close to conveying that horrible mania, and the dissolving of humanity during urban war.

The thing that makes me love *A Bullet in the Head* is how the personal violence, among and by the three friends, parallels the escalating viciousness of the war, and the soldiers in it. As the body count grows, their loyalties dissipate, their ethics erode.

Chungking Express

The most-- well-- French Hong Kong movie you will ever see. If **Godard** grew up Chinese, and had a more keenly developed sense of quirky humor, this is the movie he would make. Fortunately for us, **Wong Kar Wai** was born in his place.

All the Hong Kong movie elements are here: There are righteous cops with big guns. There are drug deals gone bad, and tough gangster chicks who can fight their way out of them. But *Chungking Express*

is really about what happens in the moments between the action: Falling in and out of love, missing connections and making new ones, and above all, being lonely in a city rife with humanity.

Drunken Master II

Jackie Chan essentially began his career with the original-- he tops it by ten in its sequel, while still managing to stay loyal to the humble form of the classic. As renown folk hero Wong Fei-Hong, Jackie grows in this film from reckless youth to adult defender of Chinese values against Western incursion and exploitation.

Pacing is solid, and the fight scenes are some of the best Jackie has ever done. The final battle in a steel foundry is choreographed with such impossible precision, it feels like a daydream. If Jackie Chan is the artistic equal of **Buster Keaton** and **Charlie Chaplin**-- and he is-- then *Drunken Master II* is his *Sherlock Jr*, his *City Lights*.

Fong Sai Yuk

By far my favorite historical Hong Kong film. Glorious production values, amazing kung fu choreography, and a great story. Plus a few surprise moments of far-reaching compassion that you've never, ever seen in any Hollywood movie, and probably never will. For those who complain about the weakness of narrative and character in most Hong Kong movies, this is the one you've been looking for.

Jet Li is Fong Sai Yuk, a quasi-mythical figure in Chinese history. Trained by his mother-- here, the excellent veteran actress **Josephine Siao**-- to be a master

fighter, he eventually joins an underground rebels known as the Red Lotus Society, organized to fight oppression by the Manchurian government.

Somehow, *Fong Sai Yuk* manages to incorporate these strands of history into a movie that blazes from comedy to tragedy to ass-kicking action in a way that is giddily effortless.

Hard-Boiled

Woo's first attempt at a fully Western-style action film, while still remaining true to his core themes of brotherhood, and honor in a world gone savage. **Chow Yun-Fat** takes on entire armies of Triads bent on importing huge arsenals to and from Hong Kong, and joins forces with a tormented undercover cop (**Tony Leung Chiu Wai**) along the way. Some of the most glorious action scenes ever committed to film, in the entire history of cinema.

The Killer

A masterpiece of modern knights with black-matte Berettas for lances, hordes of Triad gunmen for infidels, bullet-strewn nightclubs and churches for battlefields, and statues of Mary and the Chinese patron god of cops for icons. Inspired by **Melville**, **Peckinpah**, and his film *sifu* **Chang Cheh**, Woo creates a cross-cultural cinematic world of honorable crooks, stylized violence, and a brotherhood of warriors that surpasses all in power of vision.

Once Upon a Time in China

Tsui Hark turns the kung fu film into an analogy for history old and new. He reinvents the quasi-mythical hero Wong Fei Hung into a guide through China's entry into the modern era. **Jet Li** manages to insert a flashing wit and gentleness into the stolid characterization of Wong, as he battles foreigners, traitors, and a changing world. Spectacular fight choreography.

Peking Opera Blues

Tsui Hark's story of three women from three very different backgrounds, who meet up in a Beijing Opera house. **Cherrie Chung** is a thieving tart with a stash of looted loot to recover, **Sally Yeh** is the unappreciated daughter of the theater's troupe master, and **Brigitte Lin** is the butch, gun-toting daughter of a Chinese General-- and a secret revolutionary helping to bring his government down. This film plays like Beijing Opera itself-- colorful, brash, and breath-takingly gymnastic.

Project A

As a rough-and-tumble coast guard officer of the South China Sea at the turn of the century, **Jackie Chan** reinvents the kung fu film in this movie (and the equally good sequel), taking it from a era of pokey, pre-modern repetitiveness, and making it part of the artistic continuum of American silent-era physical comedy.

Swordsman II

You would never think that a great work of art could be so soaring and blood-stained, but here it is. Produced by **Tsui Hark** and directed by the king of high-flying battle, **Ching Siu Tung**.

Jet Li is a swordsman about to retire from the martial world, when he encounters and falls in love with Invincible Asia (**Brigitte Lin**), a sorceress warrior of enormous power. Somewhere in among the triple-somersault sword clashing, and the bodies split in half right down the middle, you also get an allegory for modern Chinese politics, and a subtle parable about the psychic differences between the sexes; Jet's tender, ambivalent relationship with a person of shifting gender captures this dynamic in a way no other movie has. Few filmmakers in the world have ever made a film at once so visually original and voraciously entertaining.

Long before the birth of Hollywood, predating the arrival of the Spaniards to the Philippines, the islands were home to migrant tribes from the Malay peninsula. With them came a complex and very ancient cosmology. Creatures like the *dugong* and the *al-alia*, the *aswang* and the *manananggal*, are entirely alien to the Judaeo Christian myths imported by Spain's King Felipe and his religious flagbearers.

In the 60s and 70s, most Filipino productions, with their sites firmly set on export markets, toned down this local flavour. For all their quirky qualities, *Gerry de Leon's Curse of the Vampires* and *Blood Drinkers* owe more to Hammer and Universal than to any indigenous myths. However, there are some stains which, no matter how hard you rub, you can never completely remove. As late as 1974, a film like *Efren C. Pinon's The*

Killing of Satan is able to make effortless use of ancient symbols that show how profoundly Malay magic still underlies much of the religious life of the islands. In his book *God's Dust*, Ian Buruma speaks of the Filipino psyche as being composed of "Catholic imagery of death and redemption... merged with Malay beliefs in spiritual power or *anting anting*." Only such a combination could have produced *The Killing Of Satan*.

The film opens with documentary footage of a series of mysterious rituals conducted during Easter Day festivals in the islands. In one of them, a man is wrapped in coconut matting and a knife is

drawn across it. He emerges unscathed. Soon it becomes clear that what we're witnessing is not a symbolic replaying of the emergence of Christ from the tomb, but a much more ancient form of death and rebirth. In this case, the magical transfer of power from shamanistic master to disciple. The ancient ritual of the 'King of the Cats.'

The Killing Of Satan tells of a tiny island community, terrorized by the red-robed Prince of Magic. Surrounded by his seven black-garbed cohorts, he laughs uproariously at attempts to defeat him.

Old Miguel, the village shaman, challenges the Prince to a psychic duel. Effortlessly, the Prince sends the old man spinning like a top until he collapses onto the ground, unconscious.

Later, lying in his death bed, Miguel names his nephew, Orlando, as his successor. But Orlando has

problems of his own. Living on another island far from old Miguel, he knows nothing of his call to destiny. He is more concerned with the local tough guy, Ibanez. Orlando had killed his brother and served time in prison for it. Ibanez and his henchmen turn up and shoot both Orlando and his son. As Orlando's wife mourns, she touches her husband's forehead with her crucifix. Miraculously, the bullet wound disappears and Orlando opens his eyes. "What are you doing to us, Lord?" pleads his confused wife.

Later, while sailing to Miguel's island in a small boat, Orlando and family are swept up by a mysterious wind which

SATAN DIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

by Pete Tombs



draws them to the shore where a tousle-haired, pale skinned boy waits for them. Unable to speak, he leads them to Miguel's village. Orlando is astonished to learn that old Miguel died of a bullet wound at exactly the moment when he, Orlando, rose from death. "But nobody around here fired a shot," insists Renzo, Miguel's young assistant.

While Orlando and Renzo are taking the old man's body to a watery grave, the Prince of Magic and his cohorts turn up and kidnap Orlando's daughter, and Renzo's fiancee. The two men set sail for Devil Island to rescue the women, armed only with faith in righteousness and hope that Miguel's powers may have been transferred to Orlando.

The driving force of *The Killing of Satan* is pagan and preChristian, but some of the film's images are worthy of Dante. Other elements go right back to the roots of Malay magic. The Prince's handmaids, for example, appear as beautiful women but when Orlando lays his hex on them, they turn into snakes, slithering from under their empty clothes. The Devil's most effective weapons are women. In his underground grotto, the Prince of Magic has a huge cage with electrified bars. The cage is full of naked girls. As the Prince watches his new prisoners being safely locked away, a black cloaked woman appears from the deep shadows of the cave.

"Prince of Magic, the master wishes to know if you are carrying out his instructions." He replies: "See for yourself," indicating the cage of females, "the black ribbon around their necks is the symbol of my power over them. It will not be long now before I set them free to spread evil under his banner."

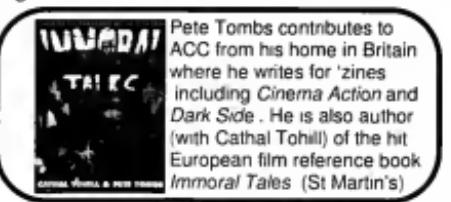
After many setbacks, Orlando defeats the Prince and has to contend with the master, Satan himself. The Devil's hiding place is a black and leafless tree, growing out of a red rock, high on a barren hillside. When Orlando calls, Satan

appears. He is disguised as an old man—but his red shadow gives him away. Orlando throws himself to God's mercy and begins a cataclysmic battle with evil.

The Killing of Satan is a remarkable find, a combination of horror film, morality play and comic book actioner. In some places it's like a medieval church painting come to life with the devil appearing in traditional form, including horns and tail, carrying a huge two-pronged fork. The special effects are crude but effective. The psychic power of the Prince of Magic is shown by whirling circles drawn directly onto the film.

The filmmaker behind *The Killing of Satan*, Efren C Pinon, has never been considered anything more than a journeyman hack. His most famous film in the Philippines is probably the 1985 production *Bomba Queen*, a fictionalized story of a domestic sex star. His lengthy filmography also includes several US/Filipino coproductions like the violent *Executioner From Death Row*. The effectiveness of *The Killing of Satan* doesn't come from any particular film making skill (although it's competently put together) but from the power of the ancient myths it evokes so unselfconsciously. The incredible thing is it's not unique. Other Filipino films, such as *Zuma* (Hell Serpent), *Snake Sisters* and *Sillip* are equally potent mixtures of the ancient and the modern, the crass and the creative.

In recent years the incredible legacy of industries (like that of Hong Kong) have excited the interest of movie fans worldwide. Let's hope it's not too long before the Philippines are subject to the same scrutiny. Who knows what gems are waiting to be unearthed.



Pete Tombs contributes to ACC from his home in Britain where he writes for 'zines including *Cinema Action* and *Dark Side*. He is also author (with Cathal Tohill) of the hit European film reference book *Immoral Tales* (St Martin's)

YOU SHOT MY DICKIE!

by Stefan Hammond

* Simon Yam cries "You shot my dickie!" after Michelle Wong takes a shotgun to his genitals at the conclusion of *My Crazy Love For You* (1993)

Wacky World of Chinese subtitles!

People have told me that their favorite part of my book, *Sex And Zen And A Bullet In The Head*, is where we reprint some of the goofier English subtitles from HK films. Here's another collection of Hex Errors which, for one reason or another, didn't make it into the book

"What a big fucken mess!"
--*Remains of a Woman*

"Very simple, open the coffin, and suck the air from the vampire leader"
--*The Ultimate Vampire*

"Crazy nut, put up another nasty show?"
--*Iron Monkey*

"Cheat him with false leg raise"
--*Kickboxer's Tears*

"A lickspit...."
--*Royal Warriors*

"A ghost in the fridge!"
--*Black Magic with Buddha*

"Damn up!"
--*Bullet In The Head*

"I chopped him to dead!"
--*My Better Half*

"I hate intruders or people"
--*Armour Of God*

"Crash your tits!"
--*It's Now Or Never*

"You think I'll use my ass-hole as my brain?"
--*Royal Warriors*

"You make me want to pee too"
--*Holy Virgin vs Evil Dead*

"They all have laughly smile. But their ancestors are cannibals."
--*Red Spell Spells Red*

"Don't tell any that I have high anxiety or I'll beat you up!"
--*Prison On Fire 2*

"Are you done yet, you one-eyed trouser snake."
--*Once A Thief*

In no way should this be construed as poking fun at the Englishically-challenged. If we really wanted gut-splittin' humor, we'd translate some efforts by first year Cantonese-as-a-foreign-language students, as they mangle the tones and produce phrases like "please wash my intestines" and "my mother is a horse." All things considered, we'd rather be able to rock-n- rock with the crowd, instead of sitting in gwailo befuddlement as uncomprehended dialogue slides over our heads. But on the other hand, we get to enjoy splintering of King's English by anonymous translators who provide the often unintelligible subtitles.

Original punctuation, spelling, and capitalization has been preserved. To do otherwise would be cheating.

"The king loves me deeper and doper now"
--*Dragon & Phoenix*

"Shooting will kill!"
--*City On Fire*

"Annoying, I fight!"
--*Possessed 2*

"IBump him dead"
--*Police Story 3*

"Dump, birgin"
--*Ghostly Love*

"Being fat it's not it shit!"
--*Women's Prison*

"Monkey, is this a meeting or a joke?"
--*Run Lover Run*

"Watch out their action, something is fishy"
--*Lucky Seven 2*

"OK! Your girand daughter gonna die"
--*Transmigration Romance*

"Shit, \$5 for 6 from us, with rice"
--*Easy Money*

"This is tiger penis!
Hold it"
--*It's Now Or Never*

"You bitch, 1-1/2 inches to make five feet"
--*School On Fire*

"What kind of world it is! Shoe the goose!"
--*Prison On Fire 2*

"You're stain!"
--*Taxi Hunter*

"Go sue the England"
--*The Big Heat*

"We think highly your criminal genius"
--*My Lucky Stars*

"I won't mind exciting sex game"
--*Naked Killer*

"Oh, a perverted wolf is a good man too"
--*Master Wong vs Master Wong*

"Pin me to death with the needle now"
--*Red And The Black*

"I'll become a puppy if I were telling you a lie"
--*Devil Cat*

"Chicken's blood and Virgin's urine?"
--*One Eyebrowed Priest*

"Ouch!"
--*My Lucky Stars*

"This was hurt by a grenade, not by a mosquito"
--*Saviour of the Soul*

"A punch for any that's missing."
--*Queen of Temple Str*

"Bastard, even two centuries in jail are too short!"
--*City Hunter*

"You should buy a wider, dumber one."
--*People's Hero*

"You bastard, thank you for the donation!"
--*Iron Monkey*

"Rattlesnake was suddenly poisoned!"
--*Gunmen*

"Can you not to kill him?"
--*Black Cat*

"Someone has been knocked"
--*Ordinance 17*

"He is a camel, but you don't have to walk a mile for him."
--*To Hell With Devil*

"Don't get trouble not belonging to you"
--*Dreaming the Reality*

"You are asked to be gentle, not bitchy."
--*Holy Weapon*

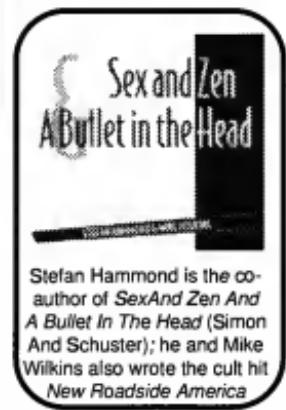
"Action begins!"
--*Killer Angels*

"You suffered a serious fumble, you'd be under observation"
--*Black Cat 2*

"Your gun is awful!"
--*Saviour of the Soul*

"Trashed by both men and women?"
--*Gunmen*

"I like criminal movies!"
--*People's Hero*







the Many Faces of Vivian Chow: HK Actress and Singer



design
by
Francine Dali



Ti Lung fights Shing Fui-On in *A Better Tomorrow 2*

SHING FUI-ON

TRIBUTE TO A HONG KONG BAD GUY

by Tony Williams

In Danny Lee and Herman Yau's co-directed film, *Untitled Story* (a.k.a. *Human Pork Buns*, 1992), the Macau police attempt various third degree methods to make Wong Chi Hang (played by one of Hong Kong's favorite psycho actors, **Anthony Wong**) confess to his grisly deeds.

Neither frequent beatings condoned by playboy supercop Danny Lee (regularly accompanied inside the police station by chosen 'hooker-of-the-week') nor vengefully painful injections by a nurse he attempted to kidnap loosen Hang's tongue. It is not until the film's concluding part that Hang finds himself confronted with one of the most nightmarish situations ever conceived within Hong Kong Cinema-- sharing a cell with a prisoner played by **Shing Fui-On!** As a relative of

one of Hang's victims, Shing promptly proceeds to beat the hell out of him. Audiences already know this is the ultimate torture and that Hang's final exit is now in sight. Wong's grotesquely gourmet chef encounters a situation parallel to a minor offender in an American prison accidentally finding himself sharing a cell with Charles Manson!

Among the many pleasures of viewing Hong Kong cinema's diverse output is the recognition of many familiar faces. This is particularly so in discerning the presence of several talented character actors who parallel the roster of "bad guys," once characteristic of Hollywood cinema. Amongst actors such as **Lam Chung** and **Lam Ching-Ying** (who plays villainous roles as well as the beloved teacher of *Mr Vampire* fame) Shing Fui-On is one of the most well-known faces.

Despite his off-screen gentle character, Shing Fui-On's threatening physical appearance has resulted in frequent performances as Hong Kong's archetypal



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"bad guy." His very presence threatens danger whether actual (*The Killer*) or mistaken (*Just Heroes*). Shing Fui-On (Cheng Kwai An) has made over eighty films since his film career began in 1984. Although *Shanghai Blues* (1984) is listed among his earliest screen appearances, Shing's career really developed after Danny Lee befriended him and got him a job playing the villain in *The Law Enforcer* (1986). After leaving school at the age of 15, he supported his family of six brothers and sisters by working as an electrician for the **The Shaw Brothers** where he witnessed a number of careers rise and fall. However, after his initial appearances he went on to appear in minor villain roles in films such as John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and *A Better Tomorrow 2* (1987) before graduating to new-generation Triad gangster boss Johnny Weng in *The Killer* (1989). In

John Woo's most acclaimed film, Shing's threatening persona embodies the director's fears of the things in danger of being lost in modern Hong Kong society. Johnny Weng represents the rising movement in brutal gangsterism, no longer re-

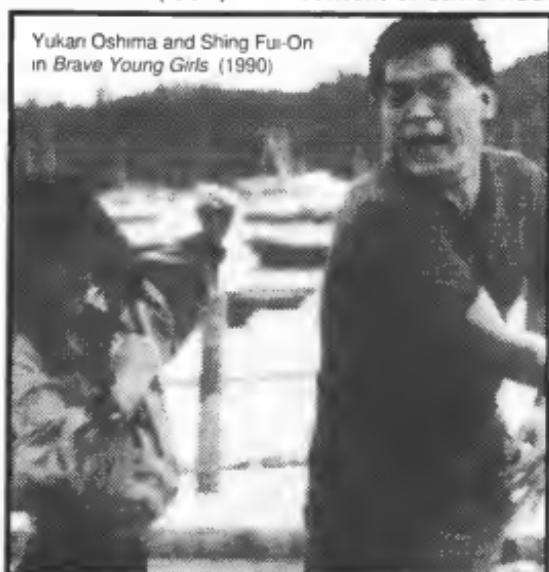
spectful of the older traditional values embodied in the paternalistic Triad bosses seen in Woo's other films such as the co-directed *Just Heroes* (1989) and *Hard-Boiled*

(1992). Johnny Weng is also another embodiment of the upwardly mobile new generation Triad gangster figure played by **Anthony Wong** in *Hard-Boiled* and **Lam Chung** in *A Bullet In The Head* (1990).

Whether as supporting actor (*Ghost For Sale*), a leading man (*Blue Jean Monster*) or cameo player (*Dragons Forever*); Shing will always be identified with the brutal and treacherous Johnny Weng. But even his other villain roles contain certain degrees of character inflection raising them above one-dimensional limits.

Seven Warriors (1988) and *Just Heroes* reveal interesting variations in Shing's villainous persona. The first film, directed by Terry Tong, reworks *The Seven Samurai* and *The Magnificent Seven* into the historical context of strife-ridden warlord China

of the 1920s. Shing plays the warlord bandit leader Piu, the Eli Wallach parallel to Adam Cheng's Commander Chi. Both Piu and Chi are former friends who fought together four years before. This tends to make stronger bonds between hero



Yukari Oshima and Shing Fui-On
in *Brave Young Girls* (1990)

and antagonist than the actual original source material does. Although Piu is a brutal killer, he relies on a code of honor shared between himself and his former friend Chi. Piu manages to

get Chi to get his old friend to agree to safe passage. Although he uses under-handed methods to gain this, he relies on the military code of honor. However, in an interesting plot development, Chi changes his mind, provoking Piu's astonished (but fully justified reaction, "How dare you! I trusted you. But you betrayed me.") Despite his villainous character, the film sympathizes with Piu at this point, an identification furthered by Shing Fui-On's acting abilities. The hero's disposal of the villain is by no means approved of as a result.

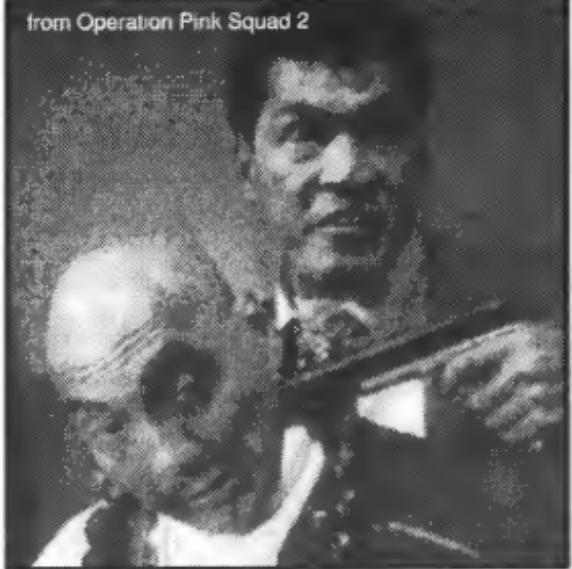
In *Just Heroes*, new Triad boss Sou (Danny Lee) believes arms dealer Wah (Shing Fui-On) is responsible for his wife's miscarriage and his former boss's murder. Each time Shing appears, his physical demeanor suggests an aura of guilt and threat. However, the film takes an ironic turn when the audience later learns that Wah is not responsible. Each time, Wah attempts a friendly gesture to Sou, he is coldly rebuffed. He is finally betrayed and killed by the vengeful Sou. Shing's performance excellently uses his minor character part to good advantage

as his manner does appear to suggest a genuine move towards reconciliation. But both Sou and the audience are suspicious of him. The latter's suspicions appear to be confirmed by Shing's predominant "bad guy" performances in Hong Kong Cinema. Wah is thus victimized by a stereotyping process which refuses to go beyond first impressions and move towards recognizing his real character. Before Wah's death, one of his men says to Sou's man, "You have a good boss," implicitly suggesting that Wah is one also. The film ironically confirms this since the "bad guy" turns out to be good after all!

The roles played by Shing Fui-On parallel "heavy" performances by actors in other national cinemas such as Nello Pazzafini and Aldo Sambrell in Italian Westerns. Mike Mazurki (1909-1990) perhaps best represents the most familiar equivalent to Shing's character roles. Mazurki will always be associated with his powerful "Hairy Ape" Moose Malloy role in Edward Dmytryk's *Murder My Sweet*, the 1944 adaptation of Raymond Chandler's *Farewell My Lovely*. He also

played the threatening "Split-face" in *Dick Tracy* (1945) and even lived to appear in Warren Beatty's postmodernist comic strip remake before he died. Mazurki also played the threatening Oriental in John Ford's *Seven Women* (1966) as well as inheriting the Victor McLaglen role in the director's *Donovan's Reed* (1963) and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). Mazurki also played comedy as *Amazon Women On The Moon* (1987) and his various television appearances demonstrate a precedent for any career moves by Shing Fui-on.

from *Operation Pink Squad 2*



Like most actors, Shing is capable of broader performances whether in cameos, supporting roles, or even as star himself. In 1989 and 1990, he received best supporting actor nominations for his roles in *Wong Fa Ka* and the Viet Nam drama *Stars And Roses*, starring **Andy Lau** and **Cherie Chung**. Like **Samo Hung** (whose *Eastern Condors* failed to attract appropriate box-office returns since audiences preferred seeing the usual loveable Samo character), Shing Fui-On faces the danger of being stereotyped. However, he has lately begun to specialize in action comedies and even appear on television surrounded by chorus girls singing the popular Taiwanese song, "I'm Ugly, but Very Gentle." **Ivan Lai's** *Blue Jean Monster* was written especially for him. Shing co-starred in the leading role with **Gloria Yip** and **Amy Yip**. He played a cop who turns into a monster after Triads shoot and electrocute him.

Shing has not only appeared in modern dramas and comedies. *Erotic Ghost Story 3* (1993) featured him in a non-characteristic role playing a shaven-headed Buddhist monk named Reverend Wick, who has the power to transport curious travellers into sensual ultra-dimension of pleasure. Despite Shing's usual roles, he is a good guy in this movie. *Ghost For Sale* (1987) saw him teamed up with **Wilson Lam** and **Ricky Hui** as a part of a ghostbusting "Three Stooges" group.

In 1988 he played the second leading role in *City Cops* as one of the cops aiding **Cynthia Rothrock** against the Triads. He also appeared in *Final Justice* in the same year as a gangster whose punk subordinate (**Stephen Chow**) falls under the benevolent protection of Danny Lee's kindly cop Shing plays the leading role in

Final Chase (1992) which also features **Waise Lee** and **Yukari Oshima** in cameo appearances (two years before, he fought Oshima in her film *Brave Young Girls*) 1991 saw Shing in the leading role of *A Rascal's Tale*, supposedly the first Hong Kong movie rated "Category III." *Rascal's Tale* featured Shing as an ex-gangster attempting to prevent his son from following in his footsteps. **Wu Ma** played another father who can not even relate to his son.

Scheming Wonders (1991) teamed Shing with **Conan Lee** of *Tiger On The Beat* fame. Shing played a renegade cop with comic-relief informers following the path of his cinematic predecessors **Chow Yun Fat** and **Danny Lee** aiding the mighty Hong Kong barbarian against a ruthless robber.

His most recent film *Horrible High Wheels* (1996) features Shing in the leading role in a plot indebted to *Texas Chainsaw massacre* (and other works), about a shoe factory's sudden successful after they begin making footwear from skinned dead bodies.

Despite his appearance in mainly villainous roles, Shing Fui-On has actually established a diverse track record as one of the most versatile characters actors in Hong Kong cinema.

Although he has yet to play a gentle lead in a kiddie adventure movie (following the lead of his Hollywood counterpart Mike Mazurki in *Challenge To Be Free* [1976]) this is not entirely beyond the realms of possibility. But even if he does, would we not all be as suspicious as Danny Lee is of the Shing Fui-On persona in *Just Heroes*?

For more about **Shing Fui-On**, see the article *Story Of Big Sillyhead*, translated by **Kam Lee** and **Daren Wheeling**, published in *Oriental Cinema* 35 (1995)

■ REVIEWS ■

TOUCH OF EVIL (1994)

DIRECTED BY TONY AU

TONY LEUNG KAR FAI * MICHAEL WONG
ROSAMUND KWAN * ELIZABETH LEE

REVIEWED BY THOMAS WEISSER

It's a very ugly world, filled with more than just "a touch of evil." That's the message behind this great-looking but exasperating film. It's not so much a movie as a collision course. Once these characters are set into motion, like crash-test dummies, they serve only one purpose. To get smashed up. Detective Leung (**Tony Leung**, sporting decidedly non-regulation shoulder-length hair) is a crazed narcotics cop dedicated to the destruction of a drug trafficking cartel run by Boss Quiao. Leung will stop at nothing to get the mission done. He is undisciplined, loud, egotistical and utterly savage in his assault against anyone who gets in the way, including his girlfriend (**Elizabeth Lee**), a fellow cop who's tired of keeping quiet about Leung's brutal procedural methods.

As the film opens, the detective bullies a pretty suspect, Coco (**Rosamund Kwan**), into betraying her gangster boyfriend, King (**Michael Wong**). But then, later, she becomes uneasy about the treachery and tries to save King by convincing him to sever his mob ties. Soon, Big Boss Quiao suspects a security breach, and he decides King must be eliminated. Then the whole thing escalates into a blood-n-guts "gun" finale, as popularized by **John Woo** and seen in count-

less HK flicks since *A Better Tomorrow* (*why is everybody except John Woo doing John Woo movies today?*). This one is better than many of its predecessors. Rosamund Kwan brings a sense of respectability to the entire lurid affair. But it's a harsh movie with an unusually high threshold for screaming and crying. And when people aren't yelling at each other, they're shooting guns, blowing up things and smacking each other around. Director Au has perfected the "baseball bat approach" to filmmaking.

CRAZY THUNDER ROAD (1980)

DIRECTED BY TOSHIHIRO ISHII

TATSUO YAMADA * MASAMITSU OOIKE
TOSHIJI KOBAYASHI * KOJI NANJO

REVIEWED BY ERIK J HUGHES

The camera pans across the bottom of a giant pit-- huge billows of smoke rise into the air. A low hum echoes on the soundtrack. The camera finally focuses and pans lovingly across an overturned motorcycle. The hum rises in volume to the dull roar of a band of throbbing, revving engines as a dozen or so reckless gang members scream across the screen.

So begins **Toshihiro Ishii**'s second film, *Crazy Thunder Road*-- a wild and wonderfully entertaining 100 minute elegy of violence and the post modern condition. The plot concerns Seiza (**Tatsuo Yamada**) the young, James Dean-like leader of a motorcycle gang. At the beginning, he and his group attack a rival gang in their own clubhouse. It's not long before the rival gang decides to get revenge. They kidnap Seiza's friend, the metal jawed Yukio, and use him as bait. Seiza is about to go after him when he is warned that it's a trap and there are literally hundreds of men lying in wait for him. Somehow, this doesn't seem to phase him. Seiza-- in fact, he actually



Tony Leung Kar Fai
in *Touch of Evil*

relishes the challenge, even though he only has a handful of men on his side.

Undaunted by the superior numbers, Seiza executes a daring (but ultimately foolhardy) attack, during which Yukio is beaten to death. Seiza and the two men he brought with him would have shared the same fate, but the leader of a paramilitary group (obviously based on Japanese novelist **Yukio Mishima**) intervenes and stops the fighting.

In his grief over Yukio's death, Seiza joins the paramilitary gang. Trained in weaponry and tactics, he learns to use his rage and aggression against his enemy. One day, while distributing leaflets for the group, he is heckled by some of his old rivals. This proves too much to take and he quits the general's gang.

Retribution is short and swift - the paramilitary gang tacks him down, and cuts off his right hand with a chainsaw. After he gets out of the hospital, Seiza goes through a painful period of misdirected rage-- until he finds a gum-popping teenage drug-addict who introduces him to an underground arms dealer, with whom he plots his ultra-violent revenge.

Originally intended as Ishii's graduation project at the Japan University in Tokyo, the film is relatively low budget. But, through clever editing and hyper-kinetic camera work, it rises above its humble origins (made apparent because Toei bought it and had it blown up from 16mm to 36mm for a theatrical release). Ishii experiments with his narrative-- from a scene between a man and his girlfriend shot in the style of a silent film (complete with title cards in Kanji), to Seiza's surreal exit from the hospital (check out the doctor fondling a mannequin dressed in a nurse's uniform), he keeps things weird and interesting throughout. The performances are excellent as well-- at all times we believe the reality of everything, almost the importance of a documentary.

The finale, which for most directors working on such a limited budget would have been inconceivable, is carried out here with energy and aplomb that we for-



Crazy Thunder Road

get all we're seeing is some class "C" fireworks and blanks going off. What we are left with is a great, exhilarating "Gee Whiz" feeling-- not the impression that the director (and his budget) has bitten off more than he can chew. The sight of a guy in black body armor and a motorcycle helmet firing a shotgun (with a home-made hook hand) at dozens of heavily armed combatants is something I, personally, wouldn't mind seeing more often. When we finally see the lone survivor ride off to the hills-- into the billows of smoke-- we recognize the bike he's riding as the very same one we saw overturned at the bottom of a pit at the beginning of the film.

Ishii was chastised by Eirin (Japanese equivalent of America's MPAA) for the film's "inherent" message ("the use of excessive violence in dealing with violence") but I believe that they missed the point. Violence is cyclical-- he who lives by the sword, dies by the sword [and all that cliched crap]. The film is another example of great moviemaking from a truly gifted contemporary Japanese director.

DR WEI IN SCRIPTURE WITH NO WORDS (1996)

DIRECTED BY CHING SIU TUNG

JET LI • ROSAMUND KWAN
CHARLIE YOUNG • TAKESHI KANESHIRO
REVIEWED BY THOMAS WEISSER

Inevitably, this film will be compared to Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones*, but that's less than half correct. There's also a clever homage to "story-within-story" movies like *La Magnifique* (1974) and

Stunt Man (1980). Yet, the bottom line is this film stands on its own and emerges as one of the best HK productions of 1996. Director Ching Siu Tung (best known for his *Chinese Ghost Story* films) delivers an intelligent, FX-laden actioner filled with an impressive array of endearing characters.

Everybody is worried about Chow Si Kit (*Jet Li*). He's a pulpwriter with writer's block, and even though he's under contract to produce a 9 volume series within a year, based on the adventures of his fictional character Dr Wei, three months have passed and, after one installment, he's out of steam. His editor is pissed off, his agent/wife is concerned, and his assistant writers are beyond frazzled.

Most of Chow's problems stem from a crumbling marriage; his wife Monica (*Rosamund Kwan*) is demanding a divorce. At one point, assistant Takeshi Kaneshiro tries to get the author back on track by explaining "A tortured life is the food of a creator." But Chow's heart is broken and he can't concentrate on writing. Chow and his two assistants (the aforementioned Takeshi Kaneshiro and popular HK starlet *Charlie Young*) fly to the Chinese wilderness in search of inspiration. Enroute, while their boss is sleeping, the two helpers begin writing for him. This starts the ball rolling; Chow, inspired by the out-of-kilter direction his novel has taken, adds his own twists and turns. Soon, the literary work becomes an amalgamation, with three different authors propelling the story into unexpected but delightful directions. As they individually try to be more and more outrageous, the plot shifts constantly and the characters (each based on real-life people) change personalities (ie., Rosamund Kwan drifts effortlessly from a "nice woman" to a whip-wielding bitch and then back to an angel again).

Most of the screen action takes place within the visualization of the on-going novel, wherein *The King Of Adventurers*, Dr Wei (also *Jet Li*), is searching for a sacred scripture which must be kept from the invading Japanese patriots. But the story, obviously due to the fertile multi-writ-

ers input, is a roller-coaster ride with incredible stunts, explosions, train wrecks, magic swords, flying sumo wrestlers, monsters, plane crashes, ninjas, fireballs and much more-- simply, this is the most impressive collection of special effects ever amassed for one movie, including some very good monster make-up (a far cry from the rubber centipede lurking at the end of *Chinese Ghost Story 2*).

In the past, Jet Li has been criticized for his stoic no-nonsense presence, in direct contrast to the more accessible light-n-breezy performances of top competitor, Jackie Chan. This time, Jet Li is very likable. He actually smiles a number of times in the film.

Plus, as if accepting a direct challenge from Jackie, Jet Li even finds himself in a drag scene (remember, Jackie Chan's gender-bender scenes in *Project S* and *City Hunter?*). But, as a girl, Jet is definitely the prettiest.

ONCE A THIEF (1996)

MADE FOR FOX TELEVISION: OCT 6, 1996

DIRECTED BY JOHN WOO

REVIEWED BY RAY RANALETTA

Let's take a pause for a moment and collect our thoughts. In 1991, famed Hong Kong director, John Woo took a break from his blood soaked aria's of ultra-violent actioners (such as *A Better Tomorrow* and *The Killer*) to create a lighthearted caper-comedy called *Once a Thief*. Despite the presence of Woo-regular *Chow Yun Fat*, good overall performances, and a couple moments of vintage Woo action scenes, the film seemed contrived and forced, unable to successfully bridge the chasm between light, slapstick comedy and straight ahead action filmmaking. This original version is by no means a terrible film. It's merely a minor work from a director capable of so much more. Ultimately an inconsequential addition to the Woo filmography. And now to the television premiere of the new all-new *Once A Thief*. Going into it I knew there was a chance it would be garbage, after all, Woo hasn't set the world on fire since his arrival in the States.



I wanted to like this film. I really did. Not being all too enamored with the original, I was hoping Woo could somehow improve upon it with this remake. I should have known better. A studio project, TV movie, how could I ignore these clues? So, shoot me, I deserve it. This remake of *Once a Thief* makes the original look like one of Shakespeare's finest works. It's that simple. This is a bastardized work, the evil twin, a cruel joke, the *Anti-Woo!!!!* I could go on-- but you get the point.

The new version opens in Hong Kong, not France, where Mac, Michael and LiAnn are a team of thieves working for Micheal's father, a Hong Kong businessman and crime lord. Just to get this out of the way, unlike the original, these are "all purpose thieves" who just happen to be art collectors (legal or illegal). This is just the first of many deviations from the source material.

Anyway, Dad considers Mac and LiAnn as part of his family as he took them in at a young age. He's been a good father until now, unlike the first film, where he was a piece of shit from the beginning. Mac and LiAnn are romantically involved which pisses off Michael. No humorous jealousies here, just stale in-fighting between the three. Michael plans to marry LiAnn when he is sent to Singapore to oversee his Dad's gun running operation. (A Fox brain-storm, I'm sure.) This plot point bears no

resemblance to the original as with the lion's share of the remake.

LiAnn isn't too keen on this marriage thang and decides to hit the trail with Mac after they betray Dad and steal his money. Talk about loyalty!! But, Dad's on to it and has Michael ambush the pair because he can't bring himself to kill them personally. Dad's a real softie. One big LAME kaboom later and it looks like Mac and Michael bite the dust with LiAnn surviving. With this, **Part One** mercifully ends. So far, the three leads seem like an intentional parody of the originals with no chemistry, merely a collection of pathetic one-liners which, I presume, are suppose to substitute for character development. And, oh yeah, in a painful twist on Woo's symbolic *white doves*, we are given *white roses* instead of red, cause they mean lifelong friendship as Mac explains to LiAnn when they reluctantly accept their relationship (yyyyyyyyech).

Part Two opens 18 months later in Vancouver (?), where LiAnn is now working for some sinister government organization involved in CIA type operations. Why? Don't know, and it isn't explained. LiAnn is now engaged to Vic, an ex cop who also works for the organization headed up by-- drum roll please-- *The Director*!! Alright, The Director is a hoot and a half. Wildly overplayed and unintentionally(?) hysterical, she rules with an iron fist. Somehow Mac survived the kaboom from **Part One** (not explained) and just happens to be in The Directors custody. "Work for me or die", she says to Mac. Hmmm. Well, Mac agonizes for about a commercial break, finally succumbing to the concept of life (I think catching a glimpse of LiAnn also had something to do with it) and agrees. Mac learns where LiAnn is living and breaks into her apartment to say "hi" with them damn white roses again. But oops, Vic's there and he's not too happy about Mac. After a silly and ridiculously staged fight, can you guess what happens? Yep, all three become a team and another luv-triangle forms (yawn, gag, puke). Their first mission together is to protect a business tycoon {and money launderer} who has been targeted by.... Yep, Michael (who

also inexplicably survived the big kaboom too). He's with his Dad and the Tang triads. Isn't it great that everyone just happens to be reunited in Vancouver?

One thing leads to another with the tycoon being gunned down, LiAnn trying to warn Michael he's in deep shit, Vic taking money from Michael, Vic and Mac stealing a Rembrandt painting from Mike (had to put an art theft in there someplace), yada, yada, yada. In the end, Michael dies over his love for LiAnn, Mac returns the Rembrandt to Dad in Hong Kong, Vic gives money to charity and the film ends happily ever after with Vic, Mac, LiAnn in a three way dance.

Is Woo totally at fault for this atrocity? No, not totally. He does deserve a share of the blame as he is listed as co-producer besides director. He knew what was being assembled. Maybe he saw how it was going to be really shitty and tried to make it campy. But it's still an atrocity. However, I'd guess that Woo was strapped with so many limitations that he was left with few alternatives. It's become all too clear that the major studios, be it theatrical or Television releases, are unwilling to allow a gifted director such as Woo a chance at continuing to create that which brought him to the mainstream attention in the first place. Time and again, U.S. audiences are being forced to swallow this putrid swill which masks the real talents of auteurs such as Woo, leaving the uninformed to look in amazement and wonder what is so damn great about the guy. This destruction of the reputations of filmmakers who rely on the visceral aspect of cinema to entertain audiences shows no signs of abating in the near future. I'm sure Woo is much better off financially than he was in Hong Kong. Maybe that's why he has accepted the artistic castration so calmly.

But I don't want to believe it. John, why have you done this to yourself? And to us! Are you really willing to compromise your talent and craft-- to sink to this level-- for the money? Say it ain't so.

FULL THROTTLE (1996)

DIRECTED BY
DEREK YEE TUNG SING

ANDY LAU • DAVID NG
GIGI LEUNG • CHIN KA LOK

REVIEWED BY THOMAS WEISSER

Essentially, in the '90s, HK cinema split into three different genres, 1) kung fu action films (a resurgence spearheaded by *Tsui Hark's Once Upon A Time In China* [1992]), 2) ultra-violent sex-thrillers known as Category III movies designed for an adults-only audience (e.g., *Billy Tang's Dr Lamb* [1992]), or 3) sensitive relationship movies (popularized by *Derek Yee Tung Sing's C'est La Vie Mon Cheri* [1993]).

With this film, director Yee takes his predilection for the "gentle touch" melodrama (which he elevated to an art form in *Mon Cheri*) and applies it to a predictable story of two motorcycle racers and the woman in their lives. **Andy Lau**, who has spent the better part of his career playing shy and diffident parts, once again follows suit. This time he's a misunderstood mechanic named Joe who's only joy in life is racing his bike. Obviously, he has trouble communicating with his girlfriend (**Gigi Leung**), and she's tired of playing second-fiddle to a motorcycle. Coincidentally, Joe's estranged father owns a successful bike business and also sponsors a high ranking racing team, but daddy and son don't get along. Ironically, another biker named David (**David Ng**) befriends Joe in hopes of hooking up with his father and thus getting a chance at the big competition.

It's a long and winding road, but David does get to ride in the Macau Race (which he wins). Joe wasn't in the competition because of an injury. In fact, the injury has convinced him to never ride a bike again. Instead, he has decided to put his energy into maintaining both the garage and his rocky relationship with girlfriend Yee. But when his business partner is killed in a racing accident, Joe straps on his helmet and

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goes into competition against David. The girlfriend, who is angry over the life-risking decision, leaves Joe. But, after the smoke clears, they make up and presumably live happily ever after.

This would be the makings of a maudlin soap opera if it weren't for the director's love for the characters he has created. These are multi-dimensional people who come alive, demanding attention and concern from the audience. It's not a terrific movie, but it's populated with some terrific people.

THUNDERBOLT (1995)

DIRECTED BY GORDON CHAN

JACKIE CHAN • ANITA YUEN
MICHAEL WONG • LO WAI KWONG

REVIEWED BY THOMAS WEISER

Well-- this story of **Jackie Chan** and his car is better than the previous one of Jackie Chan and his tank (*Rumble In The Bronx*), but it's a far cry from his epic movies like *Drunken Master 2*, *Dragons Forever*, *Police Story* or *Project A*. This is truly pale filmmaking, offering nothing more than various levels of mindless action with absolutely no concern for characterization, continuity or common sense. Jackie Chan plays a character named **Jackie Chan**, who works as a mechanic for his father's garage and junk yard. But he even finds time to train with the Mitsubishi racing team in Japan. And, he also works undercover for the HK Police in their crusade against illegal drag racing. This is one busy guy!

Plus he has attracted the attention of a crack TV news-reporter named Amy Yip (!) played by **Anita Yuen**. She accompanies Jackie one evening as he chases and captures a hot-rod thrill-driver named Cougar (*Lo Wai Kwong*). As it turns out, Cougar is an internationally wanted criminal and he is incarcerated in the Hong Kong jail.

So, Jackie becomes a hero. Amy Yip gets her big story. And they fall in love (but amazingly these two superstars are listless partners, merely going through the motions, reciting their lines without a spark of electricity between them). Meanwhile,

Cougar's gang rescues the bad guy from jail. The vengeful gangster-boss masterminds an attack on Jackie's house, destroying it, injuring daddy and kidnapping his baby sisters in the process. Apparently, the girls were snatched because Cougar wants to challenge and beat Jackie Chan on the dragstrip. He's trying to lure the top-driver to Japan for a big stock-car race.

It's not clear why Cougar is even allowed to participate in the Japanese competition at all, especially since he's one of Interpol's ten most wanted convicts. But the whole thing escalates into a massive race and then an even bigger brawl with Jackie and Cougar pitted against each other inside a Japanese Pachinko Gambling Palace.

Jackie Chan's next film would be *First Strike: Police Story 4* (1996). In that one he plays a superspy who also is named **Jackie Chan** (!). **Max Allan Collins** reviews it in this very issue, see his column on pg 44.

WOMAN IN A CAGE

aka FAIRY IN A CAGE (1982)

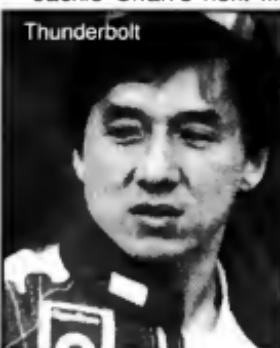
DIRECTED BY KOYU OHARA

NAOMI TANI • HIROKAZU INOUE

REI OKAMOTO • REIKA MAKI

REVIEW BY PATRICK MACIAS

Politics and sexuality seldom meet in the cinema. This is crucial, for navigating the territory can be tricky. Maladroit mating rituals and missionary positions cannot even begin to penetrate the underlying complexities of top and bottom, oppressor and oppressed. To uncover the dark reservoirs of power latent in every act of personal and institutional intercourse you'll need a hearty appetite for pleasure as well as pain; S&M and torture straight-up. The ultimate offspring of all this turbulence and



convergence could very well be *Woman In A Cage*, a Nikkatsu *pinku eiga* (pink film) the Marquis De Sade would have greatly enjoyed.

In 1945 Japan, Murayama (**Hirokazu Inoue**) is the leader of the Kenpe Sector, the official *interrogators* for the Japanese government. He randomly picks Namiji Kikushima (played by the grand matron of S&M films, **Naomi Tani**), the wife of a rich jeweler to be the scapegoat in a messy political situation involving a radical student group. While she has committed no crime, Murayama relishes the thought of "interrogating" the beautiful woman.

After Namiji has been arrested, she is taken along with her lover, a Kabuki actor, into Murayama's custody. Both protest their innocence, but to no avail. They will suffer long and exquisitely at the hands of the men and women who make up the "cultured" fraternity of the Kenpe. Beneath the facade of their civilized bureaucratic office, lies another world; a dark and foul torture chamber of iron cages, metal slabs, and coiled rope. The tribulations that Namiji and her lover undergo at the hands of Murayama and the Kenpe Group are legion. All involve constant violation and humiliation.

As the suffering escalates, a young Kenpe officer named Hakua kidnaps Namiji. She's been the subject of his masturbatory fantasies, and he takes her to a faraway mountain hideaway only to rape her. After being discovered by a Kenpe search party, Namiji and Hakua are blindfolded, propped up against the wall, and uniformly executed by a makeshift firing squad.

Woman In A Cage is a successful blend of exploitation and art. That it manages an acceptable balance between the two camps is a miracle of sorts. The film is a handsomely mounted collaboration between pulp/porn novelist **Oniroku Dan** and director **Ohara** (who churned out many other pink films for Nikkatsu). But neither would mix up sex and politics in quite the same heady fashion again.

In between the rapes and beatings come a stream of reports that Japan is losing the war. While the Kenpe sit and sip red wine, larger forces are gathering just outside the dining room, waiting to make a historical judgment on them all. Owning, possessing, and controlling the bodies of Namiji and her lover is a perverted sort of defiance, but helplessness and frustration will soon be for all to endure. *Woman In A Cage* dares to show us what turns on the emotionally and politically impotent.



Woman In A Cage

FIREFIST OF INCREDIBLE DRAGON (1983)

DIRECTED BY
WANG YUNG LING
MAPLE LIN • KEITH LEE

REVIEWED BY THOMAS WEISSER

The debut film by director Wang Yung Ling (two years later he would make the outrageous *Lewd Lizard* [1985]). This one features his own brand of misogynist mayhem as a psycho is raping and killing a series of women. After he's finished with them, the brute dumps their bodies into a wooded swamp. But then, he discovers one of the victims is missing. As it turns out, she wasn't dead after all. She organizes a vigilante group of kung fu fighting friends and they go after the freak. He con-

jures up spirits of the dead girls to help him in the ensuing battle. As it turns out, one of his victims had been pregnant when she was killed, so a ghost-flying, punching fetus also joins his spooky gang. Yes, the whole thing is tasteless. But it ranks high in the bizarre category.

SUBMERSION OF JAPAN (1973)

DIRECTED BY SHIRO MORITANI

TETSURO TANBA * YUSUKE TAKIDA
HIROSHI FUJIOKA * AYUMI ISHIDA

REVIEWED BY AUGUST RAGONE

Submersion of Japan is one of Japanese Cinema's most gripping forays into Sci-Fi--so much so, that you almost forget you're watching a fictional account, much in line with the same approach taken by **Ishiro Honda** on his classic *Godzilla* (1954): to treat the subject matter as a real event-- what if this were to really happen--and a semi-documentarian "you are there" atmosphere. Director **Moritani**, a former assistant director to **Akira Kurosawa**, capably brings SF author **Sakyo Komatsu**'s sentimental and devastating novel to the big screen.

Komatsu was born in Osaka in 1931. He graduated from Kyoto University in 1954 with a degree in Italian Literature, and turned to SF writing in 1959. He won the 27th Annual Japan Mystery Writers' Association award in 1973 for *Japan Sinks*, and the 6th Annual Science Fiction Grand Prix for *Tokyo Vanishes* in 1985 (produced by **Toho** and **Daiel** as *Tokyo Blackout* in 1986). As a screenwriter, co-director and producer, he brought his novel *Sayonara Jupiter* to the screen in 1983. Currently, he holds a number of posts, among them, that of director of the Japan Society for Future Research. Another Komatsu novel to be filmed by **Toho** was the 1974 SF-Actioner *Espy*.

After the disappearance of a small, uninhabited island in Japanese waters, a research party, led by a Dr. Tadokoro (**Keiju Kobayashi**) begins an investigation of the ocean floor along the Japan Divide. On a dive with submarine pilot Onodera

(**Hiroshi Fujioka**), they witness several strange disturbances, including a violent deepsea current, that shouldn't be there. A catastrophe is foreshadowed. Soon thereafter, an undersea volcano off the Pacific coast of Japan, erupts-- followed by a series of powerful earthquakes and tidal waves, rocking the very foundations of the Japanese Archipelago.

Prime Minister Yamamoto (**Tetsuro Tanba**), holds a meeting of scholars and specialists to seek answers for the seismic phenomena. Dr. Tadokoro warns that Japan will suffer a terrible, but inevitable disaster in the near future, as foretold by the recent violent changes at the Japan Divide. Of course, his horrifying testimony is dismissed.

A mysterious elder named Watari (**Shogo Shimada**), whose words carry weight within high circles of the government, respects Dr. Tadokoro's opinions and talks the Prime Minister into organizing a secret project team, to further investigate the phenomena. D-Plan group includes Dr. Tadokoro, Onodera, Yukinaga (**Tadao Nakamaru**)- a university assistant professor, and Nakata (**Hideaki Nitani**). After months of intense investigation, they reach a shocking conclusion: the Japanese islands are being ripped apart at the seams by a fluke in mantle convection, and it will soon sink beneath the sea.

In the meantime, an horrendous earthquake strikes the Tokyo area. The entire metropolis is leveled in mere minutes-- and the rest is wiped out by fires and floods--the casualties mount to over 3.5 million. The submersion of Japan is inevitable. The Prime Minister soon sends secret envoys abroad to request the acceptance of 110 million Japanese who must leave their country to survive. But few countries warm to the idea of accepting so many refugees.

Prime Minister Yamamoto announces the grim news: the Japanese Archipelago will sink within ten months. Onodera released from his service with D-Plan, is ready to leave for Switzerland, with his girlfriend Reiko (**Ayumi Ishida**) as soon as she returns from Osaka. Suddenly, he

receives a phone call from her: Mt. Fuji has erupted, stopping her train. Caught in the path of the chaos, she urges him to leave the country without her- she'll meet him in Geneva- but, he immediately sets out to find her.

The Japanese Foreign Minister attends a U.N. meeting to beg the nations of the world to accept Japanese survivors¹. At the same time, Yamamoto proceeds with a behind-the-scenes plan to replant the Japanese government in another country as well as D-2: the preparation for the mass transportation of refugees via air and sea. The emigration of the Japanese people is well underway when the final catastrophe begins. The island of Shikoku is the first to sink. The southern island of Kyushu breaks into two, and the main island of Honshu follows suit- completely destroying Osaka in a moment.

Determined to find Reiko, Onodera joins a rescue team. The more people he saves, he believes, the better his chances of finding her. Eventually, most of Japan is utterly submerged. While saying farewell to Watari, who wants to die with his country, Prime Minister Yamamoto is confronted with the a spectre out of the calamity, Dr. Tadokoro. He tells Yamamoto that he wants to share the fate of his country with Watari and how Yamamoto holds the future of Japanese people in his hands.

Without fanfare, the Japanese islands are gone forever. Several days later, Reiko is aboard a train traversing a snow covered region, while Onodera is among the refugees on a train crossing a prairie- each gazing at a different directions.

The late SF author **Fritz Lieber** called *Submersion of Japan* "One of the greatest science fiction films of all-time." Critic **Bill Warren**, in his review of the film in *Cinefantastique*, said that it deserved to win a Hugo Award.

Komatsu's novel ***Japan Sinks*** (also available in an abridged English edition from *Kodansha International*), was written over a several year period between 1964 and 1973. Originally, **Masaichi Nagata** and his **Daiei Motion Picture Company** optioned the rights from

Komatsu- and announced it as *Sinking of the Japanese Islands*- but when the studio went belly-up in 1971, the rights fell into the hands of producer **Tomoyuki Tanaka** at **Toho**. The resulting 2-and-a-half hour film was the most expensive Japanese films ever produced, and was one of the biggest box-office smashes in Japanese motion picture history.

Moritani's direction is deft and solid, conveying not the loss of individuals, but the loss and determination of a people. It's unfortunate that some characters' screen-time had to be shortened, but if you didn't read the novel beforehand, you're not going to miss them. Conversely, by reading the novel, the details add greatly to the viewing. The widescreen photography by **Hiroshi Murai** and **Daisaku Kimura** is not as conscious about the 2:35:1 composition as would be **Honda's** **Hajime Koizumi**, but it does not significantly detract from the overall production. The editing by **Michiko Ikeda** is excellent. Moritani's assistant director was **Koji Hashimoto**, who went onto helming similar **Toho** epics, with *Return of Godzilla* (aka *Godzilla 1985*) and Komatsu's *Sayonara Jupiter*.

The stand-out performance in the film is by veteran **Keiju Kobayashi** as the obsessed Dr. Tadokoro. Kobayashi had starred in a number of films for **Toho**, including **The Boss** corporate comedies of the 1960s. His Tadokoro is determined at all costs to prove his theory, but is then torn whether to release the news, "What will become of the Japanese? Maybe we should all die with our country." He would later return to the genre in the aforementioned, *Return of Godzilla*.

The special effects, handled by **Eiji Tsuburaya** apprentice **Tenuyoshi Nakano**, are some of the most spectacular ever given the new director-- now afforded with a budget decent enough to show the scale and scope of his mettle. Photographed by veteran staffer **Motoyoshi Tomioka**, lend the scenes of the underwater expedition a top-notch quality, achieving an ominous aura, while the destruction scenes in Tokyo are chaotic and frightening.

Submersion of Japan is a chilling and draining experience. The impending doom which faces the Japanese people, is not the utter and final loss of their homeland- but more importantly, losing of their identi-

ty. The loss of their culture. Their immortality. It is a compelling, must-see film.

Submersion of Japan made it to the US in two forms: an uncut Japanese print with English subtitles from **Toho** (in response to the cut-and-paste job done by **Roger Corman's New World Pictures**), and New World's misleadingly targeted release as *Tidal Wave*-- a 82 min. version-- nearly 55 mins. shorter than the original-- not including all the footage shot by **Andrew Meyers**, featuring **Lorne Green** as the US Ambassador (simply aping what was already in the Japanese version). *Tidal Wave* was cropped from Tohoscope to Panavision (seriously reducing Moritani's compositions) and produced by **Max E. Youngstein** for **Roger Corman**. The awful dialogue features the interpretations of **Marvin Miller** and soon-to-be cult director **Joe Dante**. Avoid at all costs.

This was a highly anticipated production from **Ronnie Yu**, but unfortunately, it does not come close to the magic of his previous *Bride with White Hair* (1993). The story is a reworking of *Phantom Of The Opera*. And, make no mistake, the familiar Yu trademarks are in full force. The film is loaded with Yu's talent for visual artistry, his unique picture blocking, coupled with his ability of capturing light and shadows in ways that make his filmmaking peers jealous. But the fatal flaw lies in the listless characterizations, punctuated by **Leslie Cheung**'s uninspired performance as the "phantom."

Cheung seems to misunderstand the role, playing Song Dan Ping as a deformed soul who hides his face behind a mask for vanity reasons, out of embarrassment for his deformity, rather than because of the tragic situation dealing with his undying love for Du Yu Yan (**Wu Chien Lien**). Director Yu should have paid more attention to the runaway performances and the inherent weaknesses in the script. Unfortunately, the end result is a great looking, but highly unsatisfying, film.

PHANTOM LOVER (1995)

DIRECTED BY RONNIE YU

LESLIE CHEUNG • WU CHIEN LIEN

HUANG LEI • LIU LIN

REVIEWED BY THOMAS WEISSE

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Japanese Pink Films

a personal overview by Ric Meyers

NOTE OF CAUTION:

If you think you might have a problem with the open and frank description of movies about violent degradation, do not read on. If you continue anyway and are offended, you have yourselves to blame. Don't say you weren't warned.

Most people know me for my *Inside Kung-Fu* magazine movie column, my appearances on the **Bruce Lee** and **Jackie Chan** episodes of **A&E's Biography** series, or my books on martial arts movies. But I was introduced to Japanese *chambara* films two hours before discovering the **Drunken Master**. So while I watched eight Hong Kong kung-fu movies a month in Manhattan's Chinatown, I was also haunting the now-defunct Bleeker Street and Thalia theaters to watch samurai double-features. It was at the former cinema that I discovered something was up with *Sword of Justice* (aka *Hanzo The Blade*): The Snare-a seriously kinky feature produced by and starring **Shintaro Katsu** (of *Zatoichi: Blind Swordsman* fame). In this one, he played "Razor" Hanzo, a 19th-century Edo cop who thought nothing of rape as an interrogation tool and had his own sexual torture chamber to elicit confessions from recalcitrant nuns, among others.

Like every other Japanese film of the era, it was beautifully filmed, acted, written, and produced--which made it a blast of refreshingly polluted air in a culture where most kinky images had to be "dirty" in conception and execution. It might have been left at that if not for the Linda Lei theater in Los Angeles. During my years in Tinseltown working on *The Twilight Zone* and

Columbo (et al) I often accompanied **Bill Connolly** (publisher of the *Spaghetti Cinema* and my *Martial Arts Movie Associates* fanzine) to this unique cinema, which was created by a G.I. returning from Japan. Every weekend it showed a triple feature: a yakuza/gangster film, a chambara/samurai movie... and a Roman porno flick.

"What the effin' asterisks was that?" I calmly inquired after seeing the charming, and beautifully made, story of a repressed son of a female pornographer who abducts a woman to prove his manhood as his mom cheers him on and even helps out. Bill explained that this was an established genre in Japan, which first presented titillating material as mock documentaries, but soon lost all pretense of social redemption. As the weekend triple features went on, I marveled at the filmmaking prowess and sick imagination of these films, which seemed to be the exclusive

product of a company called **Nikkatsu**. This studio gave shape to the Nippon underbelly in film form, while other Japanese publishers took care of perversion in the book, comic book, and electronic media. Rather than ignoring human kinkiness or pretending it doesn't exist, the Japanese accept their basest fantasies as part of the package and produce them with the tacit understanding that dreaming it is



fine, but actually doing it would not be tolerated. Since their culture's psychology is not based on Puritan repression, this works far better for Japan than it would in the U.S. (where the government seeks to regulate fantasy while letting reality run wild). Even adjusting for geography and population, the Japanese sexual crime rate is extremely small compared to America.

This is not to say the Japanese are not repressed. Far from it. In fact, they are generally much more repressed than we are. But their figurative repression is manifested by literal restraint-- which is generally accepted by their society. Apparently, by giving their sick fantasies life they create a release from their strapped down mentalities... as well as give me a great source of guilty pleasure. There are evidences of this dichotomy all over their entertainment industry. Humiliation and degradation, lovingly produced and presented. The Government's one nod to decorum was the edict that no pubic area be shown, so Nikkatsu didn't, making the audience marvel at their camera angles, lighting, and the deft positioning of flowers and furniture.

Otherwise, all bets were off. There was a chauffeur who abducted and repeatedly assaulted the rich woman he once drove, holding her captive until he immolated her in the car. There was the fisherman who kidnapped a woman and used her much like a carp-trapping her in nets, dousing her in a pool holding thousands of nipping fish, using her as bait, etc. There was the blind sculptor, who stole a live model and kept her trapped on a gigantic statue of a reclining nude.

And always the intricate spider-webs of soft rope, the occasional blue polka-dotted gag (a tradition from samurai times when a geisha or *kunoichi* [female ninja] was always gagged with this handy bit of cloth-

ing), and, of course, the ultimate in humiliation, the ever-dependable enema. Boy, *Nikkatsu* loved those digestion sound effects! They, like everything else in the features, were done with the same professionalism that you would find in a *Kurosawa* film, which made the amoral and remorseless movies artful as well as realistic. Eventually, however, the audience seemed to tire of travelers imprisoned in the basement dungeons of secluded inns, and the law of diminishing returns caused the audience to clamor for something different. The failing *Nikkatsu* continued into even wilder flights of fancy (a "best-of" compilation featured a girl getting bound and gagged by the film itself as it unreeled from a projector), and depleted their budget with expensive depictions of the Shogun's royal torture chambers. Meanwhile, other studios produced tougher stuff, featuring generic psychopaths and working class victims chosen by whim. Two of the former would follow a mother and daughter home from the supermarket, force their way in, and spend a half-hour binding, gagging, and raping them before preparing a meal with the recently-bought groceries-- using the mother and daughter's back as chopping boards. When the husband comes home from work, they attack him as well, forcing him to witness his family's further debasement. This particular effort ended with the sexually-starved wife actually going off with the attackers, but in the *Nikkatsu*-spawned industry, it made little difference what the fade-out was. Societal deconum didn't dictate that good prevail, so mass murder or monstrous miscarriages of justice were commonplace. The idea seemed to be that no one could truly recuperate from such attacks, so despairing finales were the only truly acceptable sort.

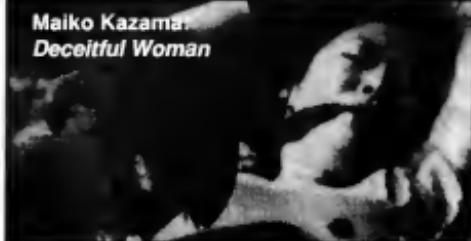
As video killed the radio star, video also killed *Nikkatsu* and their knock-offs (if not the entire film industry, which was getting too nationalistic to live anyway). The industry exploded as young filmmakers

experimented with the hand-held, anything goes, affordable, populist equipment-creating a next generation of pomo-photographers who couldn't be bothered with such nonsense as psychological complexity and character depth. The new work was even more graphic, brutal, and realistic, leading to the tabloid TV show *Hard Copy* suggesting, in their usual well-reasoned, non-exploitive way, that it (like WWF wrestling and *Jai Alai*) might not be faked. I can actually understand why they would take that hypocritical tact, given the energy of the execution. These new video series—*Clover's Night*, *Slave Hunting*, and *Bizarre Life* being three of the more dominant—also shunted away the enemas in favor of fairly straightforward "stalk and screw" scenarios. In fact, *Clover's Night* specializes in establishing a cute, sexy, young (three prized aspects of Japanese femininity) girl, having somebody stalk her for about fifteen minutes before grabbing, secreting, restraining, and assaulting her for about forty-five. The most famous installment (of the 25 so far produced) tells the tale of a shy beauty who is advised by a less attractive, but more provocative, friend how to get a handsome young man to notice her. *Simply dress in a form fitting white lycra/spandex miniskirt, white high heels, great makeup and jewelry. But before you meet him, could you do me one little favor...?* Of course, when the innocent girl goes to where her friend asks her to help her derelict brother, he has her help him to a deserted building where he chloroforms her. Then he has his way with the captive as his sister meets the boyfriend with the famous "she couldn't come but sent me instead." The villainess even calls the multiple rapist from a pay phone, with the boyfriend just outside the glass, and discusses her friend's "condition" as the man is thrusting at the kneeling, mewling, bound and gagged victim from the rear. This tale ends as many of the *Clover's Nights* do; with the camera lovingly caressing the exhausted, repeatedly despoiled victim—still gagged and bound—awaiting what fate next has in store for her.

The *Slave Hunting* series is relatively new, but of the type. The second install-

ment has a frustrated young man fixating on a cute new waitress at a local eatery. He arranges for her to deliver a take-out order and waylays her, dragging her into his apartment instead. He then ties her on her back to his kitchen table, gagging her so as to not to disturb the neighbors, and going at it. The *Bizanre Life* series is the longest running, from the *Cine-Magic* company (the *Nikkatsu* of video), so, simply to survive, their output must be eclectic by necessity. Here are esoteric tales of sexual judgment, using milquetoast boyfriends and dominatrix girlfriends as both victims and victimizers. Here are lesbians on the warpath, subjugating all the "nice" girls they come in contact with. Here blue collar workers rape a secretary on the loading dock before gagging and binding her in a box to be delivered to a lecherous co-worker.

Maiko Kazama
Deceitful Woman



What's a censor to do? As in the kinky manga, the artists simply portray the offending organs and the Government either blacks, whites, or digitally obscures them (now there's a job with a long waiting list). Speaking of unusual occupations, there are even a few actors who are proclaimed "rope-masters" and appear in literally thousands of these things—instantly recognizable to even casual viewers. Meanwhile, they go through the same routine. Attack (unrealistically), bind (tightly, with complexity, and very realistically), gag (occasionally convincingly) and actually rape (digitally obscured but true). There follows forced oral sex and dildo molestation (not necessarily in that order), then various mixes of candle wax dripping, more rape, more oral sex, whipping, suspension and different kinds of bondage in

different positions and predicaments. With all this product, it wasn't long before the filmmakers fell into a rut. Then there was the infamous *Hard Copy* "expose" and others like it. The short-term result was that these films were taken off American (and only American) shelves for awhile--mob cockroaches exposed to the light of yellow journalism.

Even so, the Japanese video makers saw that the industry needed a change, and they were up to the challenge. As with so much of Japanese pop culture, and unlike so much of the American equivalent, it wasn't submerged further into the underground, it was integrated into the mainstream.

A great boost came from outer space in general, and *Alien* specifically. Artist H. R. Giger's original concept for the Ridley Scott movie was a biomechanical sexual predator which only sought to reproduce...with anything. As with almost everything the Japanese like, they assimilated this...and improved it.

This begat the "alien tentacle" movies. They started in animation with such made-for-video films as *Urotsukidoji* (The Wandering Kid, aka *Legend of the Overfiend*), which featured raping-outer-space-monsters whose members routinely erupted out of as many orifices as they invaded. Nippon movie makers couldn't leave this well enough alone, so more animated aliens were introduced and refined until they needed female fluids in general and vaginal juices specifically to survive.

So far, it's culminated in the *Angel of Darkness* series, which combines a high school soap opera with grand guignol images of entire cheerleading squads impaled in every sexual orifice with wiggling, slimy, thick, molesting green tentacles. This series' recurring villain has a different identity in each installment, but in number two, he's a botany professor who is invaded and taken over by an intelligent, giant, blossoming orchid with a slimy penis which emerges from a slit in the center of its corolla. And guess what it

needs to survive? So in comes a parade of innocent students and a sexy fellow teacher-- each chloroformed, bound, gagged, and invaded by both the plant and teacher (often at the same time) as other tentacles and fingers stimulate their naked, heaving, animated breasts.

Live action versions of this and similar scenarios have been made, but as of yet, I haven't seen one. I'll keep you informed. What I have seen, however, is the mainstream sexual thrillers, which are openly displayed in Japanese video stores alongside the major studio releases. These are well-made, direct-to-video movies that usually feature a naked, near-naked, bound, or chained woman with a gun either pointed at her and held by her pointing at you. The stories, as far as I can tell by the few I've seen, involve anti-heroes as well as abductors and kidnap victims.

One follows a down-on-his-luck private eye trying to find a missing girl, who has been kidnapped by a rich co-worker, raped on the beach, kept bound and gagged in his beach house, and is finally drowned in a bowl of water when the rapist's sister disapproves of their unwilling houseguest.

Another tells a truly epic love story of a young man who's in to a mob loan shark, and the gang kidnaps his fiance for collateral. He tries but can't keep her from being beaten, raped, turned into a drug addict, used as a punching bag in a cage match (with a man!) for the entertainment of paying patrons, and finally thrown into a pool and told to drown a fellow female captive or be drowned by her. After all that, she is finally rescued by her true love, taken to a cabin in the mountains, dressed in wedding finery and, just as she is about to take her vows in a fresh mountain stream, is shot in the chest by the one mob guy her lover neglected to kill. The "hero" immediately rectifies that oversight, but is shot himself in the process. The two lovers die together in the babbling brook just after he gets the ring on her finger.

The Japanese just love happy endings.



a column by Max Allan Collins

FOREIGN CRIMES

For almost ten years, I wrote a column (*Mystery Seen*) for *Mystery Scene* magazine, in which I attempted to bring a mystery/crime writer's sensibilities to my film reviews. Those already quirky sensibilities-- shaped by my often-stated love for the likes of such hardboiled writers as **Mickey Spillane**, **Jim Thompson** and **James M. Cain**-- are further impacted by an interest in the comics medium, where I've done a good deal of work over the years, and a love for off-beat *noir* (**Joseph H. Lewis** and **Jack Webb** are two of my favorite directors). So it's natural that my impressions of, and opinions on, Hollywood fare often varied widely from almost any *legitimate* reviewer; frequently I praised the much reviled, and panned the over-glorified. And just as frequently, at book signings and mystery/comics conventions, I encountered intelligent filmgoers who couldn't believe I had the nerve to display such bad taste in public.

Bad or not, it's my taste, and ye who enter here should be prepared to be subjected to it. I attempt to judge movies on their own terms, am neither cowed nor impressed by violence for its own sake (bloody's fine by me, understated's good too), have a high tolerance for gratuitous sex (particularly in real life), insist on a certain level of attention by filmmakers to such trifles as plot and characterization, but admire style and even

surrealism because, hey, it's a visual medium, after all.

The editor of *Mystery Scene* had initially wanted me to write a book review column; I declined, because it's tacky to comment on the competition in public, which is why I finally stopped reviewing movies for them: some of my movie scripts have now been produced, albeit two of them by me.

And as director of those two scripts, I have incredible empathy for anyone who enters the movie-making arena; it's a brutal, heart-breaking affair, much more difficult than any of us who've been babbling in public about "film" over the years could ever dream. Also more rewarding.

Anyway, I have agreed to review movies here, because somehow I don't view foreign films (and I'm hoping editor **Tom Weisser** will someday allow me to expand beyond the boundary the title of this magazine suggests) as the competition; inspiration, maybe. Also, I will probably discuss only movies that I, to some degree at least, like.

For example, *Score!* (1994), a hard-boiled caper film starring **Hitoshi Ozawa** and directed by **Atsushi Muroga**, a somewhat misguided attempt to emulate **Quentin Tarantino**, but with much to recommend it, nonetheless. Ironically, *Score!* also draws upon Tarantino's source material-- specifically, **Ringo Lam's** *City On Fire*-- in its fast-paced,

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assaultive, Hong Kong style and story. Japanese films often rival American product in slickness, in professional sheen; so it's something of a shock to witness so many hand-held camera shots, so much lightning-fast editing, such a jarringly immediate approach. While plot elements lifted from Tarantino (this is basically *Natural Born Killer vs Reservoir Dogs*) diminish, the quick pace, the blood-spurting action, and moody *noir* lighting (seldom achieved in modern-day color pictures) make *Score!* a fun, occasionally jolting ride.

Hitoshi Ozawa portrays Chance, who gathers a team to pull a jewel heist; Chance is blackmailed by the backers of the heist into being part of a betrayal of his string at a warehouse rendezvous. Before this, however, a *Bonnie And Clyde* pair (the guy thinks he's Doc Holiday reincarnated) attempt their own hijack. The plot twists, when not borrowed from Tarantino (not the most original thinker himself), are perfunctory, video-game style turnabouts; and the characters are cartoons, particularly in lame attempts to ape Tarantino's clever dialogue (one crook's grinning discussion of a girl's "big vagina" is enough to make me long for Tarantino's motor-mouth dialogue, which no matter who's talking in his movies always reminds me

American movies, hypocritically breaking my promise not to bad-mouth the competition. Of course, I'm competition to Tarantino like that girl selling lemonade across the street is competition to Minute Maid.

A better movie than *Score!*, though not as superficially stimulating, is *Tokyo Drifter* (1965) directed by Seijun Suzuki. I admit to being unfamiliar with Suzuki's work, yet apparently the critical censuses is that he is to the crime thriller what **Kurosawa** is to the samurai sagas; and this one picture makes me a believer. A fairly simple tale of a hitman (**Tetsuya Watari**) who fades from a dishonorable gangland circumstance and becomes the drifter of the title, Suzuki's film presents an honorable "good" bad-guy hero trapped in an uncompromisingly violent world; and Suzuki presents it in wide-screen, pop-art color, with (for example) a nightclub that might be a set for an episode of *Hulla-baloo*. Goofy and eloquent (his characters, including his hitman, occasionally burst into song!), *Tokyo Drifter* links Suzuki to those other two major chroniclers of modern gangster *noir*, **Jean-Pierre Melville** and his disciple **John Woo**.

Seeing this Suzuki film (and *Score!* for that matter) is a reminder of how bad and soulless Hollywood action product can be; *Last Man Standing*, the current remake of Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* is further evidence that director **Walter Hill** has lost his way. Compare *Score!*'s kinetic editing to *Last Man Standing*'s bizarre reliance on that most distancing of film effects, the dissolve-- the big shoot-out at the fiery roadhouse in *Standing* is connected entirely with dissolves, putting us at once an extra remove, and suggesting that we are not seeing the action, but a compendium of the action. Add to this a stilted tough-guy voiceover, consistently telling us what we're already seeing, and **Bruce Willis** sleepwalking as he thrashes actors bigger than he is... just pop

Score!



of a know-it-all, annoying video-clerk, for some reason). But it's a vivid cartoon and beautifully directed.

By the way, something else you need to know is I will probably in this column occasionally sneak in my opinions about

Fistful Of Dollars into your VCR, or maybe *Magnificent Seven*, and see Asian cult cinema truly inspire some great filmmaking.

Finally, let me cheerfully recommend the new *Jackie Chan, First Strike: Police Story 4*, although I barely remember it. Of course, it has almost been a week since I saw it. That's the charm, and problem, with Jackie Chan's movies of late: they aren't just popcorn movies, they're popcorn. If the "Armour of God" movies are Jackie's homage to the *Indiana Jones* movies, then *First Strike* is his salute to *James Bond* (but, as Jackie himself says, minus the wall-to-

wall gorgeous girls). In a serious espionage context that Jackie goes out of his way (and bareass at one point) to keep

lighthearted. *First Strike* has the usual fabulous stunts, scenes set in Russia (apparently shot there, too), and the sort of off-beat humor (Jackie doing martial arts moves on stilts while going "undercover" in a bizarre

costume during a Chinatown parade) that endears him to some and just plain irritates others. I'd watch Jackie in a live-action version of *Scooby Doo*. Unfortunately, the way things are going, that may be in his near future. You did hear about Jackie and *Chris Farley*. Right?



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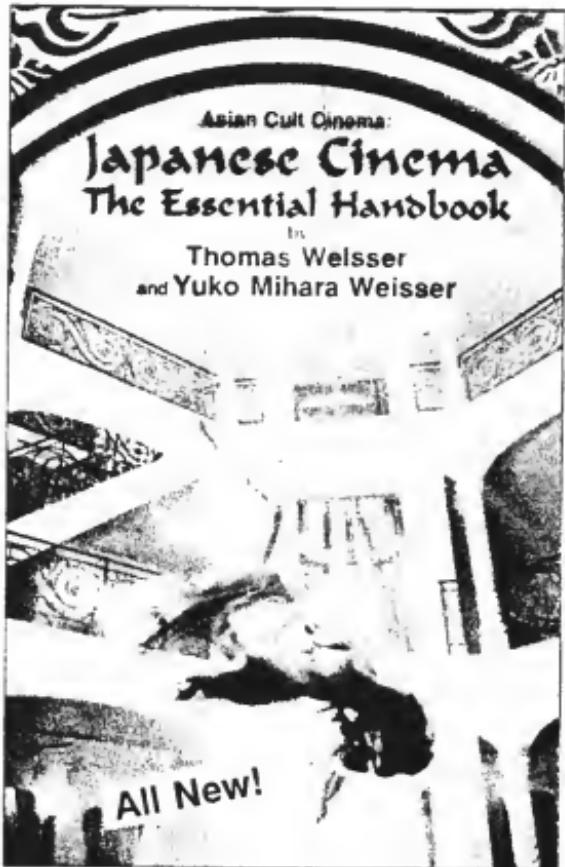
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